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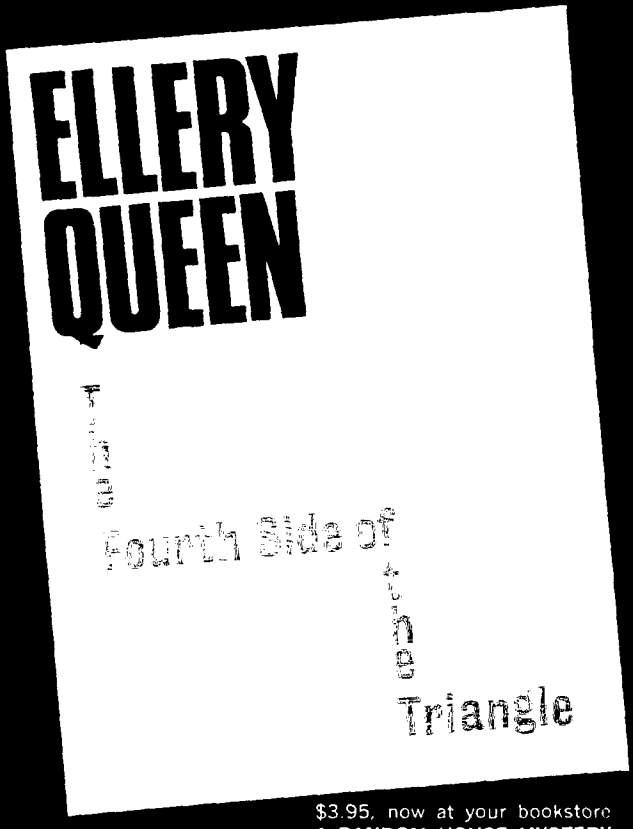

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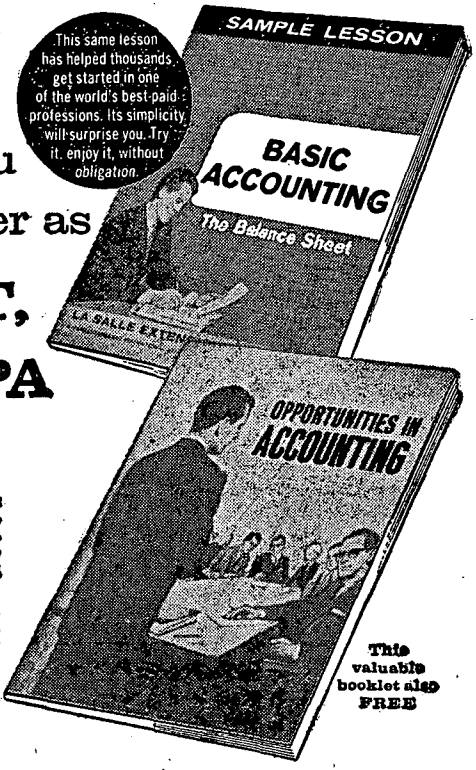
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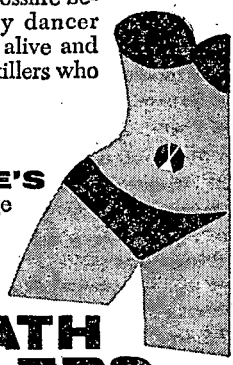

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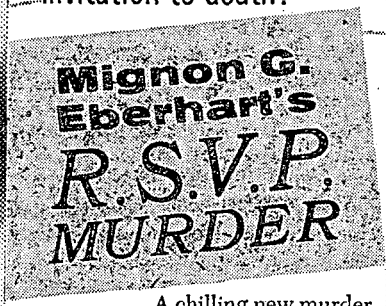

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 46, No. 5, Whole No. 264, NOV., 1965. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50c a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1965 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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JERICHO AND THE SILENT WITNESSES

by HUGH PENTECOST

A WOMAN'S SCREAM, HEARD AT TWO o'clock in the morning, will produce different results in different localities. In the plush areas of Park and Fifth Avenues, or in their expensive side streets, the scream would probably be ignored on the grounds that "it's none of my business." In the Times Square Subway station, or in Hell's Kitchen or the Waterfront areas, the scream could be a signal of violence to be avoided at the risk of one's own life and limbs.

In Jefferson Mews, in the heart of Greenwich Village, a woman's scream could be a part of Saturday night's music. Jefferson Mews had once been a group of stables built around an open court, where the rich kept their horses and elegant rigs. Eventually, with the arrival of

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the automobile and the passing of the horse car, the stables had been converted into apartments and studios, occupied by artists, writers, poets, and a collection of white-collar workers who found the surroundings "quaint." Greenwich Village today is no longer the home of great revolutionary talents in the arts. Beatniks and offbeat musicians hover there now, but real estate tycoons are gradually closing in. Modern apartment houses rise month by month above the remnants of old private houses.

Jefferson Mews remains intact, still housing writers and poets, artists and musicians, some really talented people and some outrageous fakes. A scream in the middle of the night in Jefferson Mews can have many innocent meanings—a wild party which will go on all week-end, a brawl between hopped-up women fighting over some cherished male. It could mean that Mike Guffanti was beating his wife again. Mike Guffanti, a former dockhand on the nearby Waterfront, was the landlord's handyman in Jefferson Mews. People would smile if they heard Bertha Guffanti screaming. They knew that Bertha Guffanti liked to be beaten—it was proof of Mike's manliness and her own attractiveness. She always sounded terrified, but actually her screams were a kind of savage love call.

But on the particular Saturday night—rather, Sunday morning—of this particular scream the Guffantis were already entwined in the miracle of a married love affair. They said later that they didn't even hear it.

But others heard it.

In one of the artist's studios in the Mews a man stood scowling at a blank canvas. Fluorescent lights turned the high-ceilinged room with its northern skylight into day. The artist was a huge man, six feet four, with massive shoulders and the tapering waist of a ballet dancer. He had fiery red hair and a red beard that jutted belligerently at the empty canvas. He was mixing paints on a palette with hamlike hands that moved with a concert pianist's dexterity. He heard the scream and it seemed to make him angry: it was an intrusion on his concentration.

Behind him, standing near the door of the studio, was a girl. She had high cheekbones, a pale white face, a bright scarlet mouth, hair that glittered in the artificial light like a blackbird's wing. Her dress was simple, with a deep V in front. She carried a small cheap-looking bag. She looked at a row of canvases stacked along the wall, brilliant in color, almost violent in their reflection of the artist's energy. The signature, in bold black letters, was clearly visible across the room.

Jericho.

The girl heard the scream too, and a nerve twitched high up on her ivory cheek.

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"Where do I take off my clothes?" she asked.

"You don't," John Jericho said, scowling at his paints.

"I've never taken my clothes off to be painted," the girl said, "but I wouldn't mind doing it for you."

"I'd be flattered," Jericho said, without turning his head, "if I didn't know that in your profession taking off your clothes is an occupational technique."

"You don't have to talk dirty," the girl said. "You asked me to pose. I understood artists always wanted girls to pose in the nude. I am willing."

"And always at two o'clock in the morning?" Jericho turned and gave her a cheerful grin.

"I don't know much about artists," the girl said.

"Lucky you," Jericho said. "By the way, what's your name?"

"Lucinda Laverne," the girl said.

"The hell it is!" Jericho's laugh was like distant thunder.

"You're right," the girl said. "It's really Mabel Chernovsky. When I went into show business I took the name of Lucinda Laverne. It seemed easier to remember."

"But you're not in show business any more."

The girl lowered her dark eyes. "No."

Jericho put down his palette and brushes on a square wooden table beside the easel. "Let me take the mystery out of this—Mabel," he said. "I saw you standing on the street corner outside the Mews. I've been looking at this blank canvas all day and all night. You were suddenly the answer to a problem. Since I took it you were standing there waiting for business to come along I thought you might be willing to involve yourself in my business. As I told you, I'm willing to pay your usual fee for the time involved. I'm not interested in your beautiful white body. I just want you to stand over there on that platform, looking exactly the way you did when I saw you on the street corner, before you knew I was looking at you. I want to get that expression down in paint if I can. Do you know what you were thinking about just before you saw me?"

"I wish you'd call me Lucinda," the girl said. "It would sound nicer than Mabel—coming from you."

"It's a deal," Jericho said. "Now, what were you thinking about, Lucinda?"

The scarlet mouth drew down. "What a stinking world we live in," Lucinda said.

"But you were facing up to it," Jericho said, his eyes bright.

"What else is there to do?" Lucinda said, with a faint shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"It takes courage," Jericho said.

Out in the Mews the woman screamed again, this time with a piercing note of terror.

"I wish those jerks would do

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their brawling somewhere else," Jericho said impatiently.

Lucinda stood very still, listening. Her face had turned a shade paler.

"If I tell you what I'm after," Jericho said, "I may spoil it. But I think I must. You've heard all the talk about 'the war against poverty'?"

"Politics," the girl said, with unexpected bitterness.

"Right," Jericho said. He took a black, curved-stem pipe from the pocket of his corduroy jacket and began to fill it with a stringy black tobacco from an oilskin pouch. "The rich, the influential, the hopeful vote seekers—they all talk about it. But the poverty is here—all around us here in Jefferson Mews. I know. I've been painting in this studio for two months."

"You don't look as though this was the best you could afford," Lucinda said.

"I've been looking for a kind of truth," Jericho went on. "How can hundreds of thousands of people be persuaded that the 'war against poverty' is worth fighting? I'm supposed to do a mural for a special exhibit at the World's Fair. I've thought of it a thousand ways—the filth, the rats, the overcrowding, the degradation, the crushed human dignity. If people could see that, I kept telling myself, it would 'sell' the fight. Then, tonight, I saw you."

Lucinda looked at him, puzzled.

"You see, Lucinda, in theory I'm willing to fight rats. I'm willing to contribute to mops and brooms and carbolic acid; I'm willing to buy plants for flower boxes to make things look more cheerful. But I don't feel any passionate drive about it. What would make me fight with all my guts to do something real about this poverty? That's the answer I didn't find until tonight—when I saw you."

"I don't see what I—"

"Human courage in the face of it all!" Jericho said, his voice loud. "You stood there, your head up, your eyes clear, facing up to it."

"I'm just a prostitute," the girl said, her voice a whisper.

"I know, Lucinda. It takes courage to face the fact that you've been driven to that. I saw you, and I said to myself, 'If people could see that courage in the face of a thousand horrors they'd be much more likely to enlist in the fight than they would if they saw a realistic painting of a hungry rat eating from a garbage pail.'"

Out in the Mews the woman screamed for the third time. Now there were understandable words, wrenched out of an intolerable agony. "Please, please, please—*help!* In the name of God—*help!*"

Angrily Jericho walked over to the window. He leaned out to shout, to demand that the woman be silent.

Instead he froze.

Down below, at the end of the Mews, he saw her. She was down on her knees, bent backward so that her shoulders were against the

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sooty walls of a brick building. Standing over her was the shadowy figure of a man.

It was like walking into a darkened theater and seeing a play already on. Unbelievably there were other actors besides the woman and the man. There were people at windows, watching. Like Jericho.

The man's hand rose, and for a brief moment the blade of a knife glittered in the light of a street lamp some distance away. Then the knife came down, aimed at the woman's breast or stomach. Up and violently down again. Up and down. There was one final, wavering scream.

The people in the windows remained motionless. All but Jericho. He turned, and like a charging bull, swept out of the studio, clattering down a flight of stairs to the street level.

Behind him the girl Lucinda, who had seen nothing, turned and leaned against the wall. Her body shook with uncontrolled sobbing.

Jericho raced across the cobblestones of the Mews toward the dark corner. "Stop it!" he shouted at the top of his giant voice. "*Stop it!*"

Dozens of motionless people in the upper windows watched the red-bearded artist disappear into the shadows.

The man was gone. The woman had toppled over. One side of her face lay in a little puddle of stagnant water. Moments ago it had been a lovely face. A girl's face. She couldn't have been much over twenty.

There was a quantity of blood. You could smell it.

Jericho, his eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, glanced quickly around him. No man. No sound of running footsteps. In the time it had taken Jericho to race down from his studio the man had vanished.

Jericho knelt beside the girl and lifted her face out of the dirty water. Her eyes were open, but they saw nothing. Jericho felt hot blood on his hands. He saw that she must have been stabbed at least twenty times. From the time of the first scream until now must have been an eternity for her.

Jericho's massive body shook with anger. If only he had gone to the window at the first scream—

He looked up and he saw them—faces blank with a kind of horror.

"I don't suppose any of you bothered to call the cops!" he shouted.

Faces withdrew, but no one answered.

From outside the Mews came the sounds of thinned-out traffic—the guttural roar of a night truck, the shrill whistle of the doorman outside a night club, the answering toot of a taxi horn, the vague medley of music from a dozen sources, including windows in the Mews.

Jericho, crouching on the cobblestones with the bloody body of the girl still cradled in his arms,

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glanced around at the now empty windows, and he was torn by a kind of fury.

"Somebody! Get down here!" he shouted. It could have been heard in the next block.

Then he heard someone and turned his head. It was the girl, Lucinda. She came up and stood beside him, her eyes round with disbelief, the back of her right hand pressed against her mouth.

"Stay with her while I get the cops," Jericho said. "She was murdered, and the killer can't be far away."

"No!" Lucinda said sharply. Then, "I called the police on your phone."

"Good girl," Jericho said, controlling his anger. "There were dozens of people watching—doing nothing! I never saw anything like it."

"If we'd looked when we first heard her—" Lucinda whispered.

"Yeah. Couple of drunks, I thought."

From outside the Mews came the sound of a police car siren.

Something in the girl's face made Jericho ask if she knew the woman.

Lucinda nodded slowly. "Mary Brady," she said. "Night club singer."

"She lives here in the Mews?"

"Yes."

People began to drift out of doorways, moving hesitantly toward the tragic tableau.

"They come *now*!" Jericho said, his voice harsh.

A police car swept in through the far entrance to the Mews. Two cops with drawn guns jumped out of the sharply braked car.

"Put her down," one of them said, pointing his gun steadily at Jericho's red-bearded face.

Jericho's teeth bared in a white, angry smile. "Better late than never," he said.

"Put her down."

"Get something to cover her with," Jericho said, not moving.

"What happened here?" the second cop asked.

The people moved in closer. Their faces looked like frozen masks. A shrill woman's voice broke the silence. "She was stabbed three times!"

The second cop was kneeling beside Jericho. "More like three dozen times," he said. "My God, it's Mary Brady!"

"He stabbed her," the woman said, "and then he went away and came back and stabbed her again. He went away a second time and then came back and finished the job."

"I'm giving you ten seconds to put her down!" the first cop said to Jericho.

"Not him," the shrill woman said. "He came to help but he was too late. The other man ran away."

"You're the woman who turned in the alarm?" the second cop asked.

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"Not me," the woman said.

"Dozens of them saw it," Jericho said, "but none of them turned in an alarm. My friend here, Miss Laverne, called you."

"You saw it?" the first cop asked Lucinda.

Lucinda shook her head. "Only when it was over—when Mr. Jericho ran out to help."

"You're Jericho?" the first cop asked.

"I'm Jericho."

"You with this Laverne dame when it happened?"

"Yes."

"She solicit you?" the cop asked.

"Listen, stupid," Jericho said, "this is a murder. You've got dozens of witnesses here. Stop worrying about other things. Do something about *this*!"

"Don't talk to me like that," the cop said.

A second woman pressed forward—a girl in a bright red housecoat. She had a patchwork quilt in her arms. "You can cover her with this," she said.

Jericho took the quilt and wrapped it gently around Mary Brady's body. Then he put her down on the cobblestones. He stood up, facing the cop, towering over him.

"I say it again," Jericho said. "You're stupid. While you stand here gabbling about 'soliciting,' the guy who did this is getting farther and farther away. Get a description of him and put out an alarm."

The cop's face was white but he lowered his gun, then slid it back in its holster. "You saw him?"

"He was a shadow in the dark," Jericho said. "But these people here, they all saw him close up."

A curious moaning sound from many people, like a soft wind, seemed to fill the Mews.

"You saw him make the three attacks on the woman?"

"I did not," Jericho said. "I heard her scream. I thought it was a drunken brawl. The third time I went to the window of my studio to yell down at them, to tell them to cut it out. I saw the final attack. But I was too late to catch him."

The cop glanced at Lucinda. "You two were too busy to pay any attention to the noise of the first two attacks?"

Jericho reached out and tapped the cop on the chest. "One more crack at Miss Laverne and you're going to be in the center of a riot!"

The two men stared at each other, and a slow grin moved Jericho's lips. Then the cop took a notebook out of his pocket.

"Let's start at the beginning," he said.

The police captain's name was Welch. He had been summoned from his home and he was wearing civilian clothes. He was a sandy, wiry man with a hard face and bright bird's eyes that moved quickly from person to person, from object to object, as if constant-

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ly searching for something. When they fixed on someone or something they were intense and penetrating.

Welch sat at his desk in the precinct station. Jericho stood across the desk, facing him. A green-shaded droplight illuminated Jericho like an actor in a spot. In a far corner of the room Lucinda Laverne sat on a straight-backed chair, her hands locked in her lap. This was the culmination of three hours of waiting.

"It says here you're an artist." Welch touched some reports on his desk.

"I am."

"Subletting a studio in Jefferson Mews?"

"Yes." Jericho's huge shoulders moved impatiently inside his clothes.

"How do I know you're an artist?" Welch asked. "Anyone can grow a beard and say he's an artist. The Village is full of 'em."

"Will my credentials help you find a murderer?" Jericho asked.

"Might."

Jericho reached forward before Welch could stop him, picked up a yellow pad from the desk, then took out a thick black pencil from his inner pocket. Quick, sharp lines were drawn on the pad. Then Jericho tossed it on the desk in front of Welch. The police captain stared at a brilliant, savage caricature of himself.

"Now, before you ask me a lot of questions of the kind your patrolman did," Jericho said steadily, "I was in my studio when Mary Brady first screamed. Miss Laverne was with me. She was there to pose for a mural I'm doing. Nothing else. I was preparing paints and canvas when we heard the first scream."

"You do your painting at two in the morning?"

"Often."

"You picked the Laverne woman up on the street?"

"I did. I saw something in her I wanted to paint. I asked her to model. She agreed. Period."

"You threatened a cop," Welch said.

"I called him stupid, if that's a threat."

"You handled him."

"I tapped him on the chest with this finger," Jericho said, pointing at the captain. "Instead of hunting for a killer who was still close by, your man chose to question Miss Laverne's behavior. There were dozens of witnesses. Your man didn't seem interested in them. I was burned up."

Welch pulled a surprise. "I've seen your painting of the Birmingham race riots in the Duckworth Gallery," he said. "It's good."

"It's very good," Jericho said, a faint smile twitching the corner of his mouth.

Welch leaned back in his swivel chair. "Were the police late in coming?" he asked.

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"No—not after they were phoned. The incredible thing is that dozens of people watched it happen—three separate attacks—and nobody called."

"Public apathy is a disease of the times," Welch said.

"I just can't buy apathy as the answer," Jericho said. "Among three dozen people there has to be a spark of humanity somewhere."

"You didn't pay any attention to the first two screams," Welch said. "Account for that."

"God help me, I thought it was a drunken quarrel."

"None of your business?"

"I'm afraid that's how I felt."

Welch slapped his hand on the desk. "I have a couple of dozen descriptions of the killer here. Tall, short, thin, fat"

"He was only a shadow when I saw him," Jericho said.

Welch grimaced. "We questioned the witnesses. Their answers run something like this. 'I didn't want my husband to get involved,' one housewife said. 'We thought it was a lovers' quarrel.' 'I didn't want to get mixed up with the cops.' And so on and so on. Plus 'The cops never come on time anyway.' Well, we came as fast as we could after Miss Laverne turned in the alarm. Police procedures might be improved, but we can't get to trouble till we know about it. There are men who will jump into the river to rescue a drowning man. There are others who won't. They can't swim well enough; it's none of their business; a police launch will be along presently or ought to be."

" 'Let George do it'," Jericho said bitterly.

"Something like that. But there may be more reasonable explanations for what happened tonight."

"I'd like to hear them."

"You didn't know Mary Brady?"

"Never saw or heard of her until tonight—until it was too late," Jericho said.

"Folk singer," Welch said. "Current craze of the teen-age kids. Her records sell like hot cakes."

"*That* Mary Brady?"

"That one," Welch said. "She used to sing in the coffee shops and small cafes here in the village, getting nowhere, except for a small dedicated following. Pat Zander heard her somewhere, hired her for his club. He made her into a big name in the field. She rates along with Joan Baeza, Odetta, Leon Bibb, Bellafonte, and names like that. I suppose Zander got a commission. He also got the girl. No secret they were living together."

"So?"

"We're only a few blocks from the Waterfront here," Welch said. "This Patrick Zander runs a night spot, but we've been trying to nail him for a long time in connection with loan-sharking on the Waterfront. A million dollar sideline operated from inside his hat. In spite of the Waterfront Commission, the Harbor Police, the Customs boys,

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the waterfront is still a lawless jungle. I've handled dozens of murders that were obviously seen, but there's never a witness—there's never a witness to any criminal act on the Waterfront. Witnesses get their backs or their legs broken, their eyes put out; their children get run over by trucks. Mary Brady was Pat Zander's girl. Pat Zander is a waterfront king. People in Jefferson Mews might have been afraid to report what they thought was a waterfront feud."

"Not everyone is afraid," Jericho said.

"A pointless point," Welch said. "Tonight everyone was involved with fear—or apathy. You pays your money and you takes your choice. The result is the same we have no clear description of the killer." Welch leaned forward. "There's a man outside wants to talk to you."

"Who?"

"Pat Zander. Mary Brady's boy friend. You're the only person in Jefferson Mews who made any effort at all to save his girl. He wants to know what you saw and heard, I guess."

"I can't help him," Jericho said.

"Afraid to bear witness all of a sudden?" Welch asked drily.

"Don't be silly. I can't describe the man. I was too late."

Welch picked up the phone on his desk. "Send in Pat Zander."

"Can I have a drink of water?" Lucinda asked unexpectedly, from the shadows.

"Help yourself at the cooler," Welch said.

Jericho went over to the cooler, filled a paper cup, and took it to Lucinda. She looked up at him, and there was fear in her eyes. Her lips moved. "Be careful," she whispered.

Pat Zander came into the office, slamming the door behind him. Inner violence was frighteningly near the surface. He was a big man, as big as Jericho. He was ash-blond. His face was white, with two dark burned-looking holes for eyes.

"You come up with something?" he asked Welch, his voice raw.

"Nothing. This is John Jericho, who got there too late," Welch said.

Zander turned, almost toe to toe with Jericho. He had on a white sharkskin suit and a pink shirt with a black knit tie. His clenched hands were calloused rocks.

"You son of a—" Zander said. "Fooling around with a two-bit call girl when you could have answered Mary's first cry for help."

Jericho's fist moved less than a foot to the point of Zander's jaw. The night club operator's head snapped back and he went crashing down against the wall of the office. He didn't move.

"If you don't need me any more," Jericho said quietly to Welch, "I think Miss Laverne and I will take a little fresh air."

Welch's face was a study in con-

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trolled satisfaction. "That's the first time anyone's laid a hand on Pat Zander in five years," he said. "It was overdue. I suggest the fresh air in the south of France might be a good place for a painter for quite a long spell. The Zanders of this world play for keeps, Mr. Jericho."

"Me too," Jericho said. He looked down at Zander. A little trickle of blood ran down the man's chin. "Where was he when his girl was screaming for help?"

"Working," Welch said. "Running his club. We picked him up there."

"Tell him he can find me in the Mews any time," Jericho said. "Come on, Lucinda."

At a garage about two blocks from the precinct house Jericho asked for his car. It was a Mercedes which he had been keeping there while he lived in the Mews. It was fire-engine red, with a custom-built body designed to store his painting paraphernalia on long trips. He held the door open for Lucinda when the car was brought out onto the street.

They had walked briskly from Captain Welch's office, Jericho's arm slipped casually through hers. They had spoken just two sentences on the way.

"You shouldn't have done it because Pat Zander won't forget," Lucinda said. "He's got an army to back him up."

"I had a ball," Jericho said.

The top of the Mercedes was down, and they drove through the dawn up the West Side highway, cutting off in the hundreds to Riverside Drive.

"Place up here we used to call Lookout Point," Jericho said. "Nice place to watch the day begin."

Eventually he pulled to a stop and they sat there, looking down at the Hudson River and at the New Jersey Palisades, coppery red as the sun rose. There was a little compartment between the two bucket seats. Jericho opened it, revealing a bottle of brandy and a bottle of Irish whiskey. He took out two little silver cups.

"I never drink before five o'clock," he said, grinning at Lucinda. "It is now ten minutes past five. Which?"

"The brandy," Lucinda said. "I—I still haven't stopped shaking."

"All the comforts of home," Jericho said, pouring brandy into one of the silver cups. "As a matter of fact it is home. I travel around in this until I decide to light somewhere for some project. I keep a room at the New York Athletic Club to store my clothes. Haven't slept there in five years." He poured Irish for himself and raised his cup. "Here's to the few vestiges of courage left in the world."

"Being reckless doesn't necessarily mean courage," Lucinda said.

Jericho gave her an interested glance. "You mean popping our blond friend back there? It's a habit of mine. I don't like to take it from

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anybody. I don't stop to think it over. Mr. Zander may be a little more careful with his mouth from now on."

"Was it worth having to spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder for trouble?" Lucinda said. She sat hunched in the seat beside Jericho. "Zander runs that part of town."

"That's the way those people in the Mews felt," Jericho said. "Better to avoid trouble than to face it. Mary Brady is dead because of that attitude. Welch called it apathy. Just plain no guts, I say."

"Not everyone can bend iron bars like you, Mr. Jericho. How many of those people were physically equipped, do you think, to face a man with a knife?"

"They didn't have to face him," Jericho said. "All they had to do was pick up a telephone."

"And be identified as the one who called the cops."

"Was Welch right—is cop a dirty word?"

"The cops never did anything for me," Lucinda said. "Oh, they'll arrest me for being on the street. With Mary Brady lying dead at their feet they ask me if I was soliciting. They're real quick about laws of that kind. You think they'll even come close to the man who killed Mary Brady?"

"I will if they don't," Jericho said.

She turned her head to look at him, her eyes wide. "You must be some kind of a nut!" she said.

"Honey, I just got my feet wet," Jericho said. "I can't back out of the water now." He took a sip of his whiskey, then looked at her gravely. "I'm really not a nut, Lucinda. You don't know much about painting, do you?"

"Nothing, really."

"You paint because you're driven to it," Jericho said. "Good painters like good poets have something to say. It may be a big thing, it may be a small thing. The poet says it in language the prose writer can't use. The painter says it in a way that can't be expressed in words at all. Maybe a small thing like 'Nature Is Beautiful.' It may be a bigger thing like 'Fascism Is Evil.' Ever see Picasso's Guernica or reproductions of it?"

"No."

"I'll show it to you sometime." He emptied his silver cup and put it back in the compartment. "There are people who don't think I'm a good painter. Too literary, too intellectual, too concerned with a message. To hell with them. The answer is they can't bear the truth. Same way a lot of people can't bear to hear what Freud said about the human psyche.

"What happened tonight hit me right in the middle of where I live," Jericho went on, his voice harsh. "Maybe it began with human extermination in the Nazi gas cham-

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bers. How can a man be regarded as an animal, as a subpar, subnormal citizen simply because of his race, creed, or color? Is the struggle for a democratic world just an excuse we use to cover up a struggle for power? These are all fundamental questions leading up to the big one: What is the Truth, with a capital T, about man? What is the truth about all the senseless violence, the don't-care-ism, the apathy we saw tonight, the fear to recognize a stranger as your brother—or in the case of Mary Brady, as your sister?

"That is what I hunt for all over the world, Lucinda. The Truth. To be summed up some day in a final statement that will make all of us proud or ashamed, but in either case make us Men. Somehow in color, in design, in the emotional impact of the truth stated in visual terms, I hope to move people more than they can be by words, which can always be twisted around to mean two different things. There are no clever semantic tricks in my paintings."

He laughed suddenly. "Forgive the lecture. What I really mean to say is this: it's possible to guess how the Christians felt about the lions in the Roman arenas; but if you really want the truth about how they felt you've got to get down there with the lions yourself. I'll never know the truth about tonight, Lucinda—about all those people who stood by and watched a woman die—unless I get down in the arena.

"One way to get there was to make clear to Patrick Zander that when he calls me a dirty name he has to smile. I grew up on that line—from *The Virginian*. Zander will probably come after me, but that's the only way I know of finding out the truth about him and his world and making an unmistakable statement about it."

"And that's important to you—making a statement?"

"It's my life," Jericho said. He grinned and reached in his pocket for his pipe. He'd filled it hours ago, just before he heard Mary Brady's final scream for help. At last he got to light it. "And the next most important thing, at this moment, is breakfast. I know a special place to get it."

The Mercedes headed downtown, turned east, and moved like a softly purring cat through Central Park. The special place to get breakfast was on Beekman Place—a modestly large, immaculately kept apartment house.

"You live here?" Lucinda asked, as Jericho opened the car door for her.

"I told you, I don't live anywhere," he said.

They went into the deserted lobby to a brass nameplate board with a house phone and buttons. Jericho found the name Fanning, put his finger on the button, and held it

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there. With his other hand he took the phone off the hook and held it to his ear. After a long time a woman's voice shouted into the phone so loudly that Jericho pulled it quickly away from his ear.

"Cut that out!" the woman's voice said.

Jericho took his finger off the button. "Lee, my sweet. Breakfast, please."

"It's only just past six in the morning, you big ape!"

"I know."

"*Sunday* morning!"

"I know. I have a friend with me."

"You stinker!" There was a long sigh. "All right. Bring him up."

"It's a 'she,' dear."

"Double stinker!" the voice said, and there was the click of the phone being hung up.

"She's delighted to see us," Jericho said to Lucinda.

"I know. I heard her," Lucinda said.

"Her way of being affectionate," Jericho said. "Come on."

They got into the self-service elevator and Jericho pressed the button for eleven. At the end of the corridor on eleven the door to Apartment 11F stood ajar. Jericho pushed it open and gestured to Lucinda to precede him.

The living room of 11F had a charming, lived-in quality. No decorator had planned it. The rug was Oriental and costly. There was a three-paneled, carved, Burmese screen with some sort of silk Chinese robe draped over one end of it. There was a Florentine desk, with a high-backed, delicately carved armchair behind it. There was a modern, deeply upholstered couch facing a fireplace. Nothing matched, but everything looked loved.

The east wall was all windows, looking down over the East River, and sunlight poured through them. Over the fireplace was a portrait of a golden-haired woman, painted in bold, almost passionate strokes. Jericho's signature was vivid in the lower right-hand corner. On the west wall, its colors seeming almost to burst out of the canvas, was a still life of chrysanthemums. On the north wall was a self-portrait of the artist, looking like a red-bearded Viking.

From somewhere down the hall came the sound of a briskly running shower.

"Make yourself at home," Jericho said to Lucinda. "I'll see about coffee." He barged off in the direction of what was obviously the kitchen. He clearly knew his way around 11F.

Lucinda sat down in one corner of the couch. Her hands lifted to her face, and they were unsteady. She was fighting the recurrence of earlier tears. Whether she heard the shower turned off or not she gave no sign of it. She seemed unaware of the sudden appearance of Lee Fanning in the doorway.

Lee was the golden girl of the

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painting. She was wearing a maroon satin housecoat and mules. Her generous mouth was a little too large, her nose a little too small to describe her as a classic beauty. But you would turn to look at her because of a kind of high-headed thoroughbredness—a special, individual charm.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Lee Fanning. You are the Stinker's friend."

"Lucinda Laverne."

"Welcome to our city," Lee said.

"Where the hell is the coffee?" Jericho bellowed from the kitchen.

"Coming, Master," Lee said. She winked at Lucinda and disappeared into the kitchen.

Jericho had the coffee made and was just plugging in the percolator. Lee noticed this without comment. She walked over to Jericho and was instantly taken into his arms. His kiss was tender, curiously gentle.

She pushed herself away from him but her hands still clung to his bulging shoulders. "This is a new one," she said. "Bringing your other women around at six in the morning."

"We've had a rather shocking experience, Miss Laverne and I," Jericho said.

"Do I get the first-aid kit?"

"You, my sweet, are the first-aid —you and breakfast."

"I don't care for the linkage."

"It's the best. What have you got to eat?"

"A steak for you. Juice and toast for Miss Laverne. She doesn't look your type, Jericho."

"Model," he said. "She could probably use an egg. We were witnesses to a brutal murder. The girl is somewhat shaken. Be nice."

"She's a medium-priced call girl. Right?"

"She's to be the symbol of courage for my poverty mural," Jericho said. "I punched a guy a while back for saying she was a two-bit call girl. Don't ire me, girl."

"I could smell Irish whiskey on your mustache, bub," Lee said. "What's the girl drinking?"

"Brandy. Where's the steak? You take her a drink and talk to her, nice-like, and I'll rustle food."

"Murder?" Lee said.

"That's the longest double take in history," Jericho said.

"I know your kind of elaboration," Lee said. "Murder, he says, and means somebody stepped on a tulip bud in the park."

"Not this time," Jericho said, his voice hard. Briefly he outlined the events of the evening, through his encounter with Pat Zander at the precinct house. "So if Lucinda suddenly starts screaming it means it's just caught up with her."

"All those people watching!" Lee said, her eyes wide.

"Apathy, the police captain calls it. How apathetic would you be, watching a woman being stabbed to death?"

"I could freeze," Lee said.

"That I could understand if not

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admire," Jericho said. "I think I'd like to get George over here."

"He won't like being called at this time of the morning."

"He'd sell his mother into slavery for a scoop. I have a kind of scoop for him," Jericho said.

Lee waved toward the kitchen extension. "You call him, not me," she said. "I'll get your lady friend a drink and hold her hand. Steak's in the fridge."

Lee disappeared into the living room. Jericho turned on the oven broiler, found the steak, doused it with salt and pepper. Then he went to the wall phone in the corner of the kitchen and dialed a number. After five or six rings a man answered.

"George? Jericho."

"God help me," the sleepy voice said.

"I've recently been an eyewitness to a murder," Jericho said. "The police have my story, but so far no member of the fourth estate. Want it?"

"If this is some kind of gag—"

"I gag you no gags at this time of day," Jericho said.

"Where are you?"

"Lee's."

"Oh." George sounded like a man with a large wound.

"If you get over here fast you can share a steak with me and talk to another witness as well. Girl type witness."

"So help me, Jericho, if this is—"

"See you," Jericho said cheerfully.

George Godfrey, byline reporter for the *Chronicle,* leaned back in his chair, having demolished one-third of the steak Jericho had cooked. Jericho was still working on his two-thirds. The girls sat in opposite corners of the couch, coffee cups on the low table in front of them. Godfrey lit a cigarette and refilled his coffee cup. He was a sharp contrast to Jericho—medium height, dark, very gentle.

"There's something you learn about news," he said. "Lightning *always* strikes twice—or more. A few weeks ago some kookie gent out in Queens shot his twelve-year-old daughter and then himself. The girl had some incurable disease. Next day another father in Brooklyn picked up the cue—shot his small son and himself. There was a third one in Harlem a few days later. Your apathetic witnesses aren't new, Jericho. A lady bartender was killed under similar circumstances more than a year ago. Thirty-eight apathetic witnesses, as I recall. Another girl, couple of months later, was attacked and beaten to death in full view of some forty silent observers. Now your Miss Brady. There's nothing new on earth."

"Wrong, and I'll debate it with you some other time," Jericho said, putting down his knife and fork. "The world we're living in is very new, and the people around us are new, and they act and react in new

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ways. But we use old words to describe their new actions. Apathy!"

He snorted and reached for his pipe. "Fear is at the core of our today, George—fear of the bomb, fear of poverty, fear of people who say the hell with the law. Fear makes most of us inhuman. Waterfront war, my police captain suggests. Maybe. Better let someone die than get involved in some sort of family feud. That would be apathy. Incredible apathy. I think something else."

"What?" George Godfrey asked.

"I think it's more likely that every damned one of those people knew the killer and was specifically afraid of *him*." Jericho glanced at Lucinda. "Not everybody is afraid of a generalized danger. But specific, identifiable danger is something else. One of those witnesses in the Mews can be broken. When it is done, the others will all remember what they pretended not to know tonight. If they can be sure the killer and his friends will be dealt with, they'll talk."

"Can you assure them the killer will be dealt with?" George Godfrey asked.

"I'll do it with my own little hatchet if necessary," Jericho said. He was smiling, but his bright blue eyes were cold and humorless.

"That could just be talk," George said. "That's not your world down there."

"The hell it isn't," Jericho said. "The whole world is my world, chum."

"Pat Zander will find the killer, Mr. Jericho," Lucinda said. "He has ways and means of covering every rathole in the city. It was his girl. It's his problem."

"It's everybody's problem," Jericho said. "George should make it the problem of everybody in New York City through his paper. I'm damned if I'm going to be like those people in Jefferson Mews who saw everything and did nothing."

"What with punching a night club king and shoving cops around, you haven't left yourself in the position to carry on a quiet investigation," George said.

"My dear George, I'm the noisy type," Jericho said. "While I thunder and threaten, you will do the quiet stuff. Why do you think I got you up so early in the morning? Somewhere in Jefferson Mews there must be someone whose guts aren't too rusty. Someone who'll talk."

"It's not going to be easy," George Godfrey said. "I'll make you a small bet that your Mews is jammed at this very moment with hundreds of hysterical teen-agers, grieving over the passing of Mary Brady. They'll have trampled every possible clue to death."

"She was that popular?" Lee Fanning asked.

"The goddess of folk music," George said. "This isn't just a little back-alley horror. People all over

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the country are going to be focusing on Jefferson Mews."

"What can I do?" Lee asked.

"You stay out of it!" George said sharply.

"For the time being," Jericho said. He pushed back his chair and stood up. "Come, Lucinda, I'll drive you home. As for you, George, down in the Mews you and I don't know each other. Connected with me you'd be useless. If we have messages for each other we make contact through Lee. Right?"

Lee reached out a slim hand and rested it on Jericho's arm. "Take care," she said.

His cold blue eyes softened for an instant. "I haven't turned my back on anyone for years," he said.

The Mercedes moved westward and downtown, through the light Sunday morning traffic. Lucinda, in the bucket seat next to Jericho, was staring straight ahead. At a pause for a changing light she gave him a side glance.

"Strange setup back there," she said.

"Oh?"

"Mr. Godfrey's in love with Miss Fanning, Miss Fanning's in love with you, and you aren't in love with anyone."

"You're really asking me a question, aren't you?" Jericho said. "There are several questions people always ask me. Am I in love with Lee? The answer is, she's the nicest girl I know. Do I sleep with my beard inside or outside the covers? The answer is, outside. Why don't I stick to my painting instead of always looking for trouble? The answer is, you don't have to look for trouble in this world—it comes looking for you. The question should be whether you face it or whether you run. I face it, because, as I told you, I'm looking for some kind of Truth. This makes me bad husband material, to get back to your question." His expression became grave. "Will your having been with me tonight mean trouble for you?"

"Who could care?" she asked.

"Someone who may think we saw more than we've so far admitted," Jericho said.

"There's something you may not know about my business, Mr. Jericho," Lucinda said, an edge of bitterness to her voice. "We don't talk. We don't talk about anything we see or hear. If we do we're marked 'dangerous' and then we don't do any business."

"Talk to me about your 'business' some other time," Jericho said. "You don't belong in it."

"I did two years in the State penitentiary for shoplifting," the girl said. "I wanted a little hat with a black veil. In this world of do-gooders you still don't get a decent job after that. They don't let you."

"Talk to me when this is over," Jericho said. He stopped the car near the corner of Eighth Street and Greenwich Avenue. "I'm letting

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you out here, Lucinda. No point in having anyone see you come back into the neighborhood with me. You know where to reach me—at the Mews or through Lee Fanning." He took a wallet out of his pocket and extracted several bills. "Modeling fee," he said.

"I can't," Lucinda said. "I didn't earn it."

"You will," Jericho said. "I still want you for that mural. Call it an advance if you like."

She got out of the car, clutching the money. Standing on the curb, staring at him, she looked somehow small and helpless. The red-bearded giant in the car seemed reluctant to leave her.

"Something you haven't told me?" he asked. "Something that scares you?"

She shook her head, her lips a tight red slit.

"Don't lie to me, Lucinda!"

"I'm not."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "See you around."

The girl watched the Mercedes drift away across town. Then she opened her cheap little handbag and stuffed the bills into it. She searched the interior of the bag and found a dime. She walked a little way down the block to a sidewalk telephone where she closed herself in the booth and dialed a number.

It was nine o'clock when Jericho reached the entrance of Jefferson Mews. Ordinarily it was a quiet, almost lifeless time of the day. Now the street outside the Mews was crowded with cars, including police vehicles. Two uniformed cops stood at the entrance to the Mews. They stopped Jericho as he approached.

"You got business in there?" one of them asked.

"I live here," Jericho said.

"Where?"

"Second floor studio—Number 29."

"You're the guy who slugged Pat Zander, aren't you?" the second cop asked.

"You mean I'm famous?" Jericho grinned.

"Okay, go ahead," the first cop said.

The Mews was jammed with a curiously silent crowd. They faced a building at the far end where a hearse stood outside the door. They were, Jericho noticed, mostly teenagers. A high-pitched, hysterical sob broke the silence. Mary Brady's army of admirers was here to pay their respects.

Jericho elbowed his way quickly toward the door of Number 29. He had the uncomfortable feeling someone might recognize him as the knight errant who had failed and that he might be mobbed. He got inside Number 29 and hurried up the dark stairway to the second floor.

Outside the door of the studio, rented from an artist who had wanted to spend some months in

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the country, he stopped. His huge shoulders seemed to hunch inside his corduroy jacket. The door stood two or three inches open. A small dangerous smile parted his bearded lips. He took a step forward and kicked the door wide open.

Reflected sunshine poured through the northern skylight. The blank canvas stood untouched on the easel. Jericho's paints and palette were exactly as he had left them. But canvases stacked along the wall had been moved, as though someone had looked through them.

A man sat in a dilapidated wicker armchair facing the door.

The man grinned at Jericho. "Figured you'd be coming back soon," he said. He was dark, broad-shouldered, with curly black hair. His nose was crooked. Jericho realized he had seen him around the Mews before.

"How did you get in here?" Jericho asked. He was balanced on the balls of his feet, his hamlike fists hanging loose but ready.

"Passkey," the man said. "I'm Mike Guffanti. Handyman for the landlord. When the ceiling falls in or someone drops through the floor to the apartment below, I fix it." His grin was white, almost pleasant.

"So the ceiling hasn't fallen in," Jericho said.

"My being here is friendly," Mike Guffanti said. "Say how do you paint that stuff? It's real good." He waved at the paintings stacked along the wall.

"Let's stick to the point," Jericho said.

Mike Guffanti chuckled. "I heard you knocked Pat Zander cold in the police station."

"'Heard'?"

"One of the cops in the precinct house is a brother-in-law of Mrs. Markowitz who lives down the Mews. Like a fire it spread."

"Am I a hero or a villain?" Jericho asked.

"It all depends on where you sit," Guffanti said. His smile faded. "There are some like me who think you're some kind of a nut. Cops are still around, Mr. Jericho. You could take that fancy red car of yours, pack up your stuff, and get the hell out of here—unless Mary Brady's friends decided to take you apart . . . I'll help you if you want to load up now."

"I'm not going anywhere, Mike," Jericho said.

"It figured. But I thought I'd make the offer. Friendly, that's me. Call you John?"

"If you want to."

"You should learn to figure the angles, John."

"Such as?"

"People around here respect you for what you did this morning. You tried to help. You were late, but you tried. But there are certain kings of reputations you can't upset. No one's ever hung one on Pat Zander and got away with it. He

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can't let it happen or someone else might try. They'll be holding a nice drunken wake for Mary starting this afternoon. Crowd's already gathering. The undertaker's brought the body back. She looks real good, they say. Fellow never cut her in the face. After Pat's received the mourners, he'll come looking for you."

"I'll be here."

Mike Guffanti shook his head. "You go and that'll be that. He'll be able to say you were scared and ran. That may be good enough for him. You'll know you weren't scared, and that should be good enough for you. Peace on earth."

"I'm staying here, Mike, until we find out who killed Mary Brady and why no one lifted a finger to help her. Zander should consider me an ally, not an enemy."

"He won't."

"Why didn't anyone help her?" Jericho asked.

Mike Guffanti shrugged, pulled a cigarette out of his shirt pocket, and lit it.

"Were you in the Mews when it happened, Mike?"

Mike's black eyes danced. "Yep."

"And you didn't do anything?"

"I had a previous engagement," Mike said. "I was making love to my wife. Special Saturday night-Sunday morning edition. We don't hear nothing under those conditions."

"I've heard about you, come to think of it," Jericho said. "You're the wife-beater."

"Yep. Bertha's got a black eye right now. Wears it like a medal. Different people treat each other different. Bertha and I, we understand each other. She wouldn't like it if I treated her like one of them Park Avenue dames."

"There were a hell of a lot of people who were awake and not making love at two o'clock this morning, Mike. Why didn't they call the cops?"

Mike's eyes narrowed. "You're just slumming down here, John. You don't know what it's really like."

"I want to know."

"That why you were spending time with Mabel Chernovsky?"

"She was modeling for me," Jericho said.

Mike flicked the ash from his cigarette. "Now I've heard everything," he said.

"That's the way it was," Jericho said evenly.

"Okay, I believe you. You're a nosy type guy, John. You ever nosed around the waterfront?"

"Not the way you mean. I've painted ships."

"I saw." Mike waved toward the stacked canvases. "They look great coming up the river. But that's not the story of docks, or shipping, or pilferage, or who's in the middle. Just a few blocks from here there's a whole new world, John—a different world. The Waterfront. In spite

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of all the cleanup talk this world is run by big-shot racketeers who get rich on narcotics and God-knows-what-else. One of the big wheels in that world is the moneylender who has a big share of the community by the short hair. Interest, compounded. Guy borrows a hundred bucks and pretty soon he's paid back four hundred and still owes the first hundred. And they keep on paying—or else.

"Pat Zander runs a night club, but one of his real businesses is loan-sharking. Longshoreman out of work comes to Zander's back room and borrows. If he doesn't pay off Pat sees to it his neck gets broke. Zander has got to make it clear he means business. Everybody hates him, but everybody's afraid of him. It might leak over into the Mews here. Lot of these artists and writers might need to borrow a buck and they all know about Pat. So when something happens to Pat Zander's girl it looks like it might be part of the waterfront world. Who wants to get his neck broken for butting in? Let Zander defend his own. Let Zander get even for his own. No point in getting caught in a meat chopper."

"If this happened in a waterfront district I might believe it," Jericho said. "But the Mews doesn't represent any one class or type of people, social or economic. They can't all be afraid of Zander. They can't all be indifferent."

"How do you explain it then?" Mike asked. "Obviously no one but you wanted to take a chance. Frankly, I'm glad I was occupied and didn't hear it. And if you're going to play detective nobody around here's going to help you. Too damned risky. The woods will be full of Zander's boys."

"Why have you bothered to warn me?" Jericho asked.

Mike's smile was wry. "Bertha wanted it."

"Your wife?"

"Yep. It was like this, see. Once Pat Zander pinched where he shouldn't in his club on Twelfth Street. She doesn't want him to have the satisfaction of being a big shot by knocking you over."

"I don't believe you," Jericho said.

"It's my story," Mike said. He got up from the wicker chair and stretched lazily. "Help I'll give you beforehand, John, but not after you mix Pat a second time. You see, like I'm the handyman for the landlord, I could help you pack your stuff and take off. But I don't step into the middle of no war after it starts."

Jericho walked over to the square table beside his easel. He took the lid off a blue tin of tobacco and began to fill his pipe. "There's just one way you can help me, Mike," he said.

"You can try naming it," Mike said.

"Let Zander know I'm back."

Mike grinned. "Not necessary," he said. "The minute you walked into the Mews twenty people told

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him. Way to show their sympathy. See?" He started for the door.

"Mike!" Jericho's voice was sharp. "Don't use the passkey again. I like my privacy."

"Sure. No need to use it again, John. I've spoke my piece."

"If anyone wants to give a real description of the man who killed Mary Brady, I'll listen, Mike."

"Don't sit up nights waiting for it," Mike said. "I feel sorry for a guy who gets into trouble because he don't know the score. But once he knows the score and still sticks his neck out—" He shrugged and was gone.

The sun poured down on the crowd in the Mews. It was going to be a hot day. The hearse moved slowly through the reluctant crowd, away from the corner house. Mary Brady's body was now lying in state in her little apartment.

A woman came out of one of the buildings across the way carrying something covered by a dish towel. Food for the wake.

On the steps of the building next to the corner house a young man with a straggly beard stood up above the crowd, a guitar cradled in his arms. He began to sing. It was a hymn, done to rock-and-roll rhythm. *I Walked in the Garden Alone*. After the first few words the crowd joined him, uncertain at first, then clear and loud. It had been one of Mary Brady's favorite songs.

The woman who had delivered the gift of food returned through the singing crowd toward her own house. A thin man in a dark suit stepped out of a doorway to intercept her.

"May I speak to you for a minute?" George Godfrey asked.

The woman looked around anxiously. "You a cop?" she asked.

"Would I ask you' nicely if I was?" George said, smiling.

"Reporter?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"They're holding a wake for Mary Brady today?" George asked.

"Yes," the woman said. "My name is Meloney. Mrs. Thomas Meloney. Spelled M-e-l-o-n-e-y. Most people spell it with an 'a'."

"I'll make sure of it," George said. He went through the motions of making a note on the back of an envelope. "Isn't it rushing things? A wake the same day she was killed."

"Don't they sound wonderful, singing like that? It's a free day for everyone," Mrs. Meloney said. "I just took in a bowl of potato salad."

"It's a strange story, Mrs. Meloney," George said. "How so many people watched it happen and nobody lifted a finger to help Mary Brady or even to pick up a telephone and call the police."

Again Mrs. Meloney took an anxious look around. "There was that artist guy—he tried, but too late."

"But that was at the very end, as

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I understand it," George said. "Almost half an hour after Mary Brady screamed the first time."

"He had a girl up there," Mrs. Meloney said.

"But there were thirty-forty other people, Mrs. Meloney. They didn't all have girls or fellows. Not one of them did anything."

"Screaming isn't unusual down here," Mrs. Meloney said.

"But they *watched it happening!*" George said. "They actually saw the man knifing Mary Brady."

"It was dark," Mrs. Meloney said. "You couldn't be sure what was happening."

"You saw it? You were one of the ones who saw it, Mrs. Meloney?"

A man's voice shouted from behind them. "Sally! Get the hell back in here where you belong!"

"Excuse me," Mrs. Meloney said, and was gone.

George Godfrey took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face. He had turned at the sound of the man's voice, but he'd seen no one.

Another woman carrying a cooking kettle headed for the Brady building. George started toward her. She glanced at him and hurried on. At the same moment a big man came out of the Brady building —a big blond man. He wore a white shirt, open at the neck, and a pair of white buckskin shoes. He came straight toward George, ignoring the singers.

"You want something, bud, you might as well get it from me," the man said to George. "I'm Pat Zander."

George looked him over slowly. Zander's angry eyes were bloodshot, and there was a strong smell of liquor about him.

"I'm Godfrey of *The Chronicle*," George said.

"You got 'reporter' written all over you," Zander said.

"May I express my sympathy," George said.

"What do you care?" Zander asked.

"I'm a human being. I'm sorry for the troubles of other human beings," George said.

"You want a story. You don't give a damn," Zander said. "These people are here to pay their respects. I don't want any reporters around, making a fancy story out of it."

"How do you account for the fact that nobody was willing to help your girl last night?" George asked.

Zander looked as though he was trying to decide whether it would be fun to break George's arm.

"I talked to reporters at the police station," Zander said. "People are people. Down here they're no different than anywhere else. I'd give my right eye if one of them had the guts to pick up the phone. They didn't. It could have saved Mary—but people are people."

"If it had been my girl," George

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said quietly, "I'd be taking those witnesses apart one by one."

"I'll handle it my own way," Zander said. "I know how to square things for Mary."

"What are you going to do about the guy who knocked you cold in the police station?"

Muscles bulged along Zander's jawbone. "That's a private fight." He turned and looked up at the skylight of Jericho's studio.

"There's going to be a lot about this in the papers," George said. "About how nobody would lift a finger to help a famous woman in desperate trouble—just let her die on the street. These people all knew her and none of them would act. Would you say they were your enemies, Zander?"

"I'd say it was time you took off," Zander said grimly.

"My job is to get an explanation of what happened," George said. "My paper isn't going to let the story die. The people of the city are going to want to know how it could have happened—how people could stand by callously and watch three separate attacks on Mary Brady. Maybe you take a poke at me, Zander, but there are a dozen other guys to follow up for me in case I can't go on with the job. It's not good enough to make some kind of one-word explanation for what happened, like 'fear' or 'apathy' or 'indifference.' There's a story behind the behavior of these people and it's my job to dig it out. You can help or not as you choose, but the story will be dug out."

George, watching the blond giant who faced him, drew some conclusions about him. Pat Zander wasn't just an impetuous powerhouse. There was a shrewd, calculating look in the bloodshot eyes.

"I'll level with you," Zander said.

George, an experienced reporter, braced himself for the runaround.

"You could say it's mostly my fault that things happened the way they did," Zander said. "We live tough down here and I'm one of the tough ones. I've scared people into keeping their noses out of my business. Time comes I need 'em to stick their noses in and they act the way I've learned 'em to act. They don't budge. They acted the way they've been warned they should act. It was tough it worked out that way for Mary—and for me."

"You figure someone tried to get at you by attacking your girl?"

"What else?" Zander said.

"It just doesn't smell like a revenge killing," George said. "It wasn't quick and clean and certain. He hacked at her, then went away, hacked at her again, then went away again. Then he came back a third time! A fumbler, or maybe a guy who got his kicks out of making it long and agonizing. Not a killer for a mob. Not a knockoff and a quick getaway."

"And it'll take me just as long to finish him when I find him," Zan-

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der said. "Long and slow and rough!"

"You and Mary got along well?" George asked quietly.

"Ask around, if you don't think so," Zander said.

"I will," George said. "If she was cheating—"

"That'll do, bud!" Zander said. "Mary never looked at another guy."

Up in the studio in Number 29, Jericho stood by the north window looking down on the Mews. He had watched George talking to Mrs. Meloney and Zander. His black pipe, cold, was gripped between his strong white teeth, and his fiery red eyebrows were drawn together in a scowl.

There was something fascinating about the slowly enlarging crowd in the Mews pressing forward toward the house where Mary Brady had lived and now lay in her coffin, the ravages of death obscured by the undertaker's art. In the beginning the crowd had seemed to consist almost entirely of teen-agers. But now there were people of all ages.

The bearded guitar player still led them in song, the voices curiously moving as they sang the music that had made Mary Brady famous, and apparently much loved. The inevitable television cameras had appeared at the mouth of the Mews, and reporters, equipped with walkie-talkie devices, were scrounging around for interviews with anyone who would talk.

A knock at the studio door turned Jericho around. With a gesture of impatience he crossed to the door and slid back the bolt. Captain Welch stood outside.

"So you did come back," Welch said.

Jericho nodded.

"This isn't official," Welch said. "You don't have to ask me in."

"Help yourself. Box seat over there by the window."

Welch walked over to the window and stood looking down at the singers. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Festival of Death," Jericho said. "They're all having a great emotional binge over it."

"Liquor will presently be added," Welch said. "Once they open the doors for the viewing it will start to flow." He glanced at Jericho, towering beside him. "You recognize any of the faces you saw down there last night?"

Jericho shrugged. "I've been asking myself that," he said. "There was a woman, talking to a reporter. She took some food to the Brady house. She was the one who brought a quilt to cover the body with last night. There was another woman who did some talking to the cops, but I haven't seen her this morning. The rest—"

Jericho gave an angry tug at his beard. "If there's one thing I nor-

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mally pride myself on it's my ability to observe detail—a kind of photographic memory for the visual. There were dozens of faces in the windows last night, staring down at that killer knifing the girl. And now I draw a blank! It's as though they all wore identical masks. I was concentrating on the girl, and peering into the shadows for some sign of the murderer. When I yanked myself back from that and looked around for the faces at the windows they were gone."

"Only four or five people have come forward," Welch said. "They all agree with you that there were thirty-five or forty witnesses. We've talked to every person with apartments facing on the Mews. Some of them say they came to their windows too late to help. Some insist they never went to their windows at all—we know they're lying. No specific description of the man. Most of them admit they recognized Mary Brady. She had dark hair which she wore shoulder length. Unusual, attention-getting. She'd bend over her guitar when she sang and that dark hair would hang down around her face. She'd make little gestures of brushing it back from her face between choruses."

"You've heard her perform?"

Welch nodded. "A phenomenon of the times. Operating in my precinct. It got to be a habit to drop in at Zander's club around midnight to hear her. Once you started to listen to her she got her hooks into you."

"That good?"

"Very good," Welch said. "You should pick up some of her records. I don't know how to describe it—a kind of purity."

"Purity!" Jericho sounded angry. "And living with Zander?"

"Loose phrase. Only a presumption," Welch said.

"You said so yourself."

"I shouldn't have said it," Welch murmured. "Zander doesn't usually hang around a girl for a year and not make it. So we assumed—" He shrugged. "She lived here in the Mews. He has an apartment over his club on Twelfth Street. He's handled her career. Manager. But she's never seen out with other men. Oh, they crowd around her in the club, but she never went anywhere with them. She didn't drink, didn't smoke. Those kids out there think of her as a kind of angel."

"You know so much about her," Jericho said. It was almost a question.

Welch gave him a quick, shy glance. "We've been on Zander's tail for a long time. I told you we suspect him of loan-sharking. 'Suspect' is a technicality in this case. We know, but no one will testify against him. A guy like Zander could be in on a dozen rackets. So we check out on everything about him. Mary Brady was one of the things 'about him.' But I kid you not, Jericho. She had a strong ap-

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peal when you saw her as often as I did. I wouldn't like this case to go in the 'Unsolved File'."

"I wouldn't like it either," Jericho said. He walked over to the window, scowling. "There have to be people down there who'll talk, people who felt about her the way you did."

"But they won't talk to me," Welch said.

"So you dropped by for a cup of coffee and a friendly chat," Jericho said. "Coffee in that electric percolator. Help yourself."

"No, thanks."

"So chat," Jericho said sharply.

"I gave you some advice," Welch said. "South of France, I suggested. So you're still here. Again I say South of France. Will you go?"

"Don't be a fool," Jericho said.

"People might talk to you if you stay in one piece long enough," Welch said. "If they see you're back. If they see you're not scared. I think maybe the wrong girl was killed for the jungle law of see-nothing, hear-nothing, tell-nothing to hold up this time."

Jericho looked down at the singing crowd. Their voices were louder. They seemed to be developing a kind of religious frenzy.

"It's my intention to pay my respects to the dead," he said.

Welch's eyes narrowed as he lit a cigarette. "You're going to the wake?"

"Seems to be a public affair. I'd like to say a small prayer for the girl and ask her forgiveness."

"Forgiveness?"

"For not listening to her cry for help until it was too late."

"You're a romantic," Welch said.

"You're an unusual policeman," Jericho said. "Of course I'm a romantic. Love affair with life, and a feud with death. That's me."

"I have the machinery to close in with," Welch said, "if I had two witnesses."

"Two?"

"That's the law."

"The law, the law, the law!"

"It protects everyone—the good and the bad," Welch said.

"If I get on the trail of this guy I won't wait for two witnesses to settle with him," Jericho said.

"Leave the settling to me," Welch said. "I don't want to have to tangle with you."

"I'll play the cards as they fall," Jericho said.

"You'll keep in touch?"

"Fair enough. When there's anything to tell, I'll tell you."

Welch gestured toward the window. "Zander won't welcome you down there."

"I'll welcome his lack of welcome," Jericho said.

"Miss Otis regrets
She's unable to dine tonight, Madam—"

The voices in the Mews rose in the slow rhythm of a dirge. The famous satirical ballad sung by those

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young voices had all the quality of a genuine hymn of grief.

Jericho, now wearing a dark-gray tweed suit and a black knit tie with his white shirt, edged into the outer fringe of the crowd, moving toward the house where Mary Brady's body lay. The first few yards, gently shouldering his way through the traffic jam of mourners, attracted only some irritated glances. Then a shrill voice broke out over the music.

"He's the one! He's the one who tried to help her!"

The singing broke off in midphrase. They swarmed around him like a rising sea, clutching at him, babbling questions.

"You must have seen the man?"

"Why didn't you go after him?"

"Did Mary speak to you?"

"What did she say? Didn't she name him?"

"Shut up! *Give him a chance to talk!*"

There was sudden silence. Young faces, twisted by sorrow, stared at him eagerly. Jericho glanced over their heads to the door of Mary Brady's house. A line that had started to move slowly in and out of the house had stopped, puzzled by the sudden end of the singing.

"I can't help you," Jericho said in a loud voice, "but there are people here who can."

"Who?"

"Tell us!"

"Listen to me!" Jericho thundered, and they were silent. "Thirty or forty people watched it happen. Some of them must have seen clearly. Some of them could probably tell you the man's name. Ask them! Insist on an answer. I saw only a shadow. I was too late. She never spoke to me. She was dead when I reached her."

A murmuring wail seemed to run over the crowd.

"I would like to pay my respects," Jericho said.

For the moment he was one of them. They opened a way and he walked toward the house, into the shade cast by the overhanging buildings. He stepped into the line that had started to inch forward again. A man in a black suit, obviously one of the undertaker's staff, stood at the door.

"We'd like to keep the line moving," he said in a somber voice. "If you are a personal friend there are refreshments being served in the garden at the rear."

Mary Brady's apartment was on the ground floor of the house. It had not been lavishly furnished, and now those furnishings had been moved from the living room to make space for the coffin, banked by white flowers, and a dozen or so folding chairs from the undertaker's. People in the line went to the chairs, sat for a moment with bowed heads, praying, then rose and walked slowly toward the coffin.

At the back of the room Jericho, his eyes bright and hard, glanced

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quickly around, looking for Zander. There was no sign of him. From behind a closed door in the far corner which opened into the garden came the incongruous sound of muffled laughter.

Jericho had no formal religion. He slipped into one of the chairs and lowered his head. His lips moved.

"Wherever You are, and whoever You are, help her," he said softly.

Then he stood up and returned to the line, towering over a small woman who was in front of him. This little woman reached the coffin, knelt, kissed it, rose, and moved hurriedly on. Jericho, his muscles suddenly tense, was at the coffin, looking down.

The quality of this girl had escaped him in the early hours of the morning when he had held her in his arms, the last warmth of her blood staining his hands. The moment had been incredibly violent. Now he saw her, serene in death, her dark hair framing her face. Even in death there was something about her that explained the adoration of the young people outside. She must have aroused an impulse to protect her when she was alive. It was there now—a silent plea for help.

"I'm sorry, baby," Jericho heard himself say. "I was too damned concerned with my own piddling little project."

He took a quick look around the room, stepped out of the line, and opened the door to the garden. For a moment the quiet of the chamber of death was jarred by a man's high-pitched laugh, and then Jericho closed the door behind him and walked out into the sunlight.

Two long tables, covered with white cloths, were stretched from one wall of the small garden to the other; the tables were weighted down by dishes of food. There was a cold turkey, a ham, a roast of beef, and assorted salads and relishes. There were plates of sliced Italian bread and bowls of butter. There was a large supply of liquor in bottles and many glasses. An ice machine had supplied a mountain of cubes in a cast-iron pail.

The laughter came from a group of hard-looking men. Jericho labeled them "waterfront." Pat Zander, now wearing a dark suit with his white buckskin shoes, stood in the center. Jericho didn't hear the joke that had caused the laughter.

Separated from the men were a group of about a dozen young people who seemed to represent the crowd outside. Among them was a tall sad-faced Negro. He was the only one in the garden who seemed to notice Jericho's sudden appearance. He took the few steps that brought him face to face with the artist.

"You're Jericho," he said in a husky voice. "I'm Harry Baker. I play the piano in Zander's club. Mary was my friend. I wanted to thank you for trying."

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"Too late, too little," Jericho said.

"You tried," Baker said. "That's more than anyone else can say. You crazy, man, coming here?"

"I don't think so."

"Pat and his friends have plans for you," Baker said. "I don't think they'll start anything here, so that gives you time to put distance between you and them, man."

"I'm not going anywhere, Mr. Baker, until the man who's responsible for Mary's death is identified and made to pay."

"It's your hide, man," Baker said with a little shrug. "Want I should get you a drink?"

"No, thanks. But you can answer some questions."

"You can ask them," Baker said.

"I didn't know her," Jericho said. "How did she fit with Zander?"

The grave, dark eyes stared steadily at Jericho. "Gratitude," Baker said. "Obligation. He made her famous. She felt she owed him."

"She loved him?"

"You got to make a definition of that word—love," Baker said.

"Was there any other man?"

"All of us," Baker said slowly. "All of us loved her. But not the way you mean. No other man."

"You think it could simply have been some psychopathic stranger?"

Baker lowered his eyes. "It'll say so in the papers," he said.

"But you don't think so?"

"Man, what I think couldn't matter to nobody."

"To me," Jericho said.

Baker hesitated. "She left the club early, like she had a date. Kept looking at her watch, then left early. Pat asked me if I knew where she was going. I told him I thought she was going home. What else could I tell him? She didn't confide in me. But I thought she had a date with someone."

"No idea who?"

"No, man. And maybe if I did I wouldn't tell you. I'm like those people out there early this morning. I don't want any involvement. No, man."

Jericho was about to ask another question when the comparative quiet of the garden was shattered by Zander's voice, loud and angry.

'Out! Out of here—now!"

Jericho spun around, thinking the words were directed to him—that Zander had only just spotted him. But Zander wasn't looking at him. He had moved out of his group of friends toward the door to the house. Standing just inside was Lucinda Laverne. She had backed away at the sound of Zander's voice so that she was leaning against the closed door, her face dead-white.

"We don't want anybody like you here pretending grief!" Zander said, "get out!"

Jericho touched Baker's arm. "Talk to you later," he said.

"Easy, man," Baker whispered.

Jericho took several quick strides across the garden so that he stood beside the trembling girl.

"I was looking for you," she said.

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Jericho gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder. His bright blue eyes were fixed on Zander's face. "This is where I came in," Jericho said.

"Later!" Zander said. "You and I will have it out later." He didn't turn but he spoke to his friends behind him. "Take a good look at him, boys. This is the one."

"I'd like it now," Jericho said.

"I don't want that woman here," Zander said. "It soils the occasion. And you soil the occasion. Better advise her to go—and you go with her."

"Please!" Lucinda whispered.

Jericho ignored her. He took a step closer to Zander. "I don't like what comes out of your mouth," he said. "I think I'd like you to apologize to the lady."

"Lady!" Veins stood out on Zander's forehead, but for some reason he controlled what was obviously an overwhelming rage.

"Now," Jericho said softly. His body moved slightly, balanced on the balls of his feet.

Zander spun around, his hands clenched at his sides, shaking. "Just go away," he said. He seemed to be strangling. "Sorry I blew my top."

Jericho stared at him, puzzled. It seemed out of character for Zander to back down, especially surrounded by his strongarm friends. Lucinda was tugging at Jericho's sleeve.

"Please come," she said.

Jericho glanced at Baker. The solemn pianist's lips moved in what might have been a silent prayer. His eyes were lowered.

"I want to make it easy for you, Zander," Jericho said. "But play it your way. Any time, any place suits me."

Zander lowered his head, apparently fighting for control. He didn't speak. His group of friends stared at Jericho hungrily.

Jericho shrugged and turned to Lucinda." "Let's go," he said.

Lucinda's arm was cold as ice. Jericho opened the door to the inner room and they stepped through into the stillness where Mary Brady lay. Curious faces lifted to look at them, but the line of mourners kept moving slowly, steadily, past the dead girl.

Jericho and Lucinda edged out into the sunlight of the Mews. The singing had stopped and the crowd had thinned a little. Most of them had worked their way into the line that would pass through the house.

Lucinda almost ran, with Jericho striding alone beside her.

"I saw you go in," she said. "I was afraid of what might happen to you."

"I don't get it," Jericho said. "Why didn't something happen? The odds were all with him and his friends."

"Witnesses," Lucinda said. "I didn't know Harry Baker and those others were there, or I wouldn't have gone in. Zander won't indulge in any public violence. The police are too interested in him, too eager

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for an excuse to nail him. But now you've made it ten times worse for yourself. You forced him to back down in public."

"Good for his soul," Jericho said.

"For God's sake, it's no joke!" They had reached the mouth of the Mews. "Please, Mr. Jericho, drop this. Go away."

"It's just getting interesting," Jericho said, his eyes cold. "But what about you? Will he be saving up something for you, now?"

"I—I can take care of myself," she said in a low, frightened voice.

"I think not," Jericho said. "You get a few things together and take a taxi to Lee Fanning's place. I'll phone her you're coming. Stay there for a day or two till things straighten out."

"I couldn't do that. It's not fair to involve her."

"Who will know? Which is the point, Lucinda. You just disappear for a while. If you argue with me I'll have to take you there myself."

"I don't think I—"

Jericho's hand closed over her arm and he steered her back into the Mews. A man in a dark suit stood in one of the doorways.

"There's George Godfrey," Jericho said. "Don't look at him or pay any attention to him."

He led her to a spot directly in front of the doorway where George stood. He bent toward her as though he were talking to her, but his voice was raised so that George could hear him.

"Our Lucinda has stuck her neck out, George," Jericho said, smiling at Lucinda. "I want her to stay with Lee for a while. She argues. I want you to take her there, George."

"You saw Zander?"

"We both saw Zander," Jericho said. "Lucinda isn't safe. So do what I tell you. I'll phone Lee."

"What about you?" George asked.

Jericho chuckled. "*'I'm bidin' my time'*" he said. "*'That's the kind of guy I'm.'* Now you be a good girl, Lucinda, and obey orders."

Standing by the window in his studio Jericho talked to Lee Fanning on the phone.

"George is bringing her," he said. "Knowing George, he'll make certain he isn't followed. Once the girl is with you, Lee, she's safe."

"Of course." Lee's voice was clear and steady.

"I wouldn't involve you in this if I could see any way she can be traced to you, Lee."

"I don't mind being involved." And when he didn't speak, "What about you?"

"I begin to smell fish," Jericho said. "A large, decaying fish. But I can't put it together yet. So I wait here in my box seat and watch."

"Is it worth it, Jericho?"

"My darling Lee, don't you know that's my trouble I can't mind my own business."

"I know it only too well," Lee said, a note of bitterness in her voice.

The sun rose in the sky and it was

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hot in the Mews. The line of viewers still seemed endless, moving slowly in and out. Sitting at his window, chewing on the stem of his cold black pipe, Jericho kept watching the door of the Brady house. Neither Zander nor any of his personal friends had left the building.

Shortly after noon Harry Baker, the piano player, walked quickly out of the house, across the Mews, and out of sight. His was the only familiar face that Jericho saw in what seemed to be an endless vigil.

Soon after that the phone rang. It was Lee. George had arrived with Lucinda. George himself got on the wire and assured Jericho they hadn't been followed. He'd taken a long excursion around and through Central Park and changed cabs twice.

"The girl says they'll wait until they can get you alone," George said. "Do you have to be a hero?"

"I have to satisfy my curiosity," Jericho said. "You want to make like a reporter again?"

"Could be."

"Check on a man named Harry Baker who plays the piano at Zander's Twelfth Street Club. I think he'd like to talk, but he's afraid to. Maybe he has a record. You might find something that would loosen his tongue."

"I don't get it," George said. "What can he talk about unless he was there and saw something?"

"He hinted to me that Mary Brady had a date last night, that she went back to the Mews to meet someone. I think he may know who that someone was, but I don't think he'll tell unless we find a way to twist his arm."

"You think the Brady girl was killed by someone she had an appointment with in the Mews?"

Jericho hesitated. "Or someone who wanted to prevent her from keeping that appointment," he said.

"Okay, I'll get on to Baker," George said. "Not that I love you, but watch your step."

As the afternoon lengthened, the line of viewers continued to file in and out. Jericho made himself a pot of coffee and a sandwich and sat by the window, watching, waiting, watching.

A little after three his phone rang again. It was Captain Welch.

"Glad you're in," Welch said. "I have news."

"Good, I trust," Jericho said.

Welch's voice sounded odd. "I have my two witnesses," he said.

"To the killing!"

"Yes. Two people who have identified the Brady girl's murderer."

Jericho's breath eased out of him in a long sigh. "Who?"

"You," Welch said tonelessly.

"What?"

"You," Welch said. "A man and a woman, both living in the Mews, identify you positively. They saw you come back three times, stab the girl each time, and then come back again and pretend to help her."

"So!" Jericho said softly. "So it's come to that. The chips are down..."

(*continued on page 141*)

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ERLE STANLEY GARDNER *tells all*
— well, nearly all

A nonfiction feature by Erle Stanley Gardner in which the creator of Perry Mason recalls the beginnings and early days of the hard-boiled school, with anecdotes about Carroll John Daly (possibly the real founder of hard-boiledism); Captain Joseph T. Shaw; Dashiell Hammett; one of Erle Stanley Gardner's own "hard-boiled" characters, Ed Jenkins, the "Phantom Crook"; and a final comment (and a very shrewd one, indeed) on Ian Fleming and James Bond . . .

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

HOW MUCH DOES CONTEMPORARY FICTION REFLECT THE MORES OF THE times, and how much do the mores reflect contemporary fiction? Do books really cause the younger generation to feel that they must disrobe and hop into bed? These are questions similar to the one about the chicken and the egg.

There is a growing tendency among contemporary writers to describe SEX in capital letters, and to describe violence in great detail, with minute accounts of bare fists spattering blood, teeth being kicked in, ribs cracking, and so forth. We know that young thugs are using utterly senseless and sadistic violence in their holdups, as some of them have admitted, "just for kicks." Why? Who are they emulating? To what extent is their conduct influenced by contemporary fiction? The hard-boiled school of realism likes to claim that it is writing of things as they are, but I believe that much of its work is the result of the sheer imagination of frustrated individuals.

Life was seemingly more innocent and certainly more secure in the early days when Carroll John Daly, Dashiell Hammett, and I began writing for *Black Mask*, edited first by a man named Sutton and then by the susceptible Captain Joseph T. Shaw. Carroll John Daly helped to originate the hard-boiled school of detective writers when, some forty-odd years ago, he created the character of Race Williams.

Race Williams could well have been the parent of Mike Hammer. In fact,

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there are such startling resemblances that one can certainly suspect a family relationship. The big difference between Daly's stories and the adventures of Mike Hammer is that Race Williams was too busy for sex. Race Williams would draw his gun and would ask the reader, "Was I bluffing?" The other man in the story evidently thought he was, because he would keep coming.

But Race Williams never hesitated. Daly would tell of how he tightened the trigger, how the round hole appeared in the man's forehead, and of the look of surprise on the man's face before the eyes started to glaze. Then the hole, which had been purple around the edges, would turn red and the man would pitch forward.

As I remember, the last line of one particular story read: "I sent him crashing the gates of hell with my bullet in his brain."

Now, Carroll John Daly had never had the slightest experience with actual crime or criminals, much less with bullet wounds, except the one night he spent in the Tombs when an ingenious confidence man, wanting to give an address which would bear checking, simply took the telephone book of White Plains, New York, and selected a name, address, and telephone number at random. The name happened to be that of Daly.

When the police officers rapped at the door, Daly answered. They asked him if his name was Carroll John Daly. He said it was. That was enough. The next thing Daly knew he was on his way to jail.

I have always felt that Daly, who was tough in spirit but slender in physical build, used Race Williams as a means of satisfying subconscious impulses which he knew could never be gratified in real life.

Daly himself wanted no part of the rough and tumble. When winter came, he shut himself up in a house which was regulated by thermostatic control, so the temperature never varied over two degrees one way or the other.

He once told me, "You think I don't get enough exercise and that I'm not an outdoor man. I want you to know that on some sunshiny days I think nothing of going out and walking the full width of this lot on the sidewalk—and this is a fifty-foot lot!"

Daly had a copyist who lived in New York. He never met the copyist. He never wanted to. Only on rare occasions could he be tempted to go to New York. It was a major undertaking for him. He lived in one of a row of identical houses. If he went more than a block away, he would sometimes have trouble picking out his own house when he came back, since he so rarely saw it from the outside. Returning after dark from one of his infrequent trips to New York, he studied the row of houses, picked what he thought was the right one, and rang the bell.

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A strange woman came to the door.

Daly lifted his hat. "Can you tell me where Carroll John Daly lives?" he asked.

"Why, yes, he—why *you're* Carroll John Daly!"

Daly bowed, "I know who I am, Madam; I am only trying to find out where I live."

It was Daly's habit to sleep until noon. He would then get up and spend the afternoon in carefree ease with the family or with any visitors who dropped in. After the family had been safely tucked in bed and the visitors had gone home, Daly would come to life. He would sit at his typewriter and pound out words until five or six o'clock in the morning. During those early hours the incomparably hard-boiled, bone-crunching, fast-shooting Race Williams came to life.

Dashiell Hammett, on the other hand, was one of the few writers I have known who had all the earmarks of genius and the temperament which goes with it. For a brief period he was a Pinkerton detective, and because of this experience he dazzled credulous editors with a presumably encyclopedic knowledge of the underworld.

Dashiell was also a fast hand with a dictionary of criminalese and had a vast knowledge of editorial psychology. Heaven knows how these dictionaries of the underworld are composed. Undoubtedly they represent considerable research, but how much of this research is done on the ground and how much in a library?

When Hammett started writing, there was a dictionary of the underworld which used the word "shamus" as a tag for a private detective. Hammett picked that word up, and it ran through all his stories. Every time one of his detectives would enter on the scene, someone would sneeringly refer to him as shamus. Since Hammett's time a whole school of realistic writers have had their characters refer to the private detective as a shamus.

Just where did that word come from? I have made it a point to try and find out, and I am completely baffled. The late Raymond Schindler, one of the world-famous private detectives, told me he had never heard the word. At my request he had asked private detectives whom he employed, and they had never heard it used. I asked the wardens of various penitentiaries, and they told me they had never encountered the word except in fiction. During the past eighteen years I have had quite a few contacts with the inmates of penitentiaries; I have asked them about "shamus" and whether they had ever heard it applied to a private detective. Not one of them ever had.

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Then one day I happened to be discussing the matter with a man who had worked for a Jewish haberdasher, and he told me he *had* heard the word used; it applied not to a private detective but to some sort of phony. No matter; thanks to Dashiell, the *Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo* lists "shamus" as a Jewish-American word meaning a policeman or a prison guard, and the *American Thesaurus of Slang* lists it as applying to a policeman, an informer, or a stool pigeon.

It has been many years since Dashiell Hammett first put the word into circulation. Today the general reading public considers "shamus" a slang term customarily used by the underworld in describing the private detective. It assumes that the writer who uses it knows his way around.

At first, Editor Shaw and Dashiell didn't hit it off. Hammett became enraged over a rejection by Shaw and quit writing for *Black Mask*. I was in New York at the time, and after conferring with Shaw, wrote Hammett a letter pleading with him to return to the fold.

Later on, of course, after the fame of THE MALTESE FALCON, Hammett could do no wrong. Captain Shaw not only went all out for Hammett but tried to get writers to follow the Hammett style. One of my big differences with Shaw came when I accused him of trying to "Hammettize" the magazine.

However, before Hammett and Shaw had become such buddies, Hammett wrote a story which contained an expression that gave Shaw quite a jolt. He deleted it from the manuscript and wrote Hammett a chiding letter to the effect that *Black Mask* would never publish vulgarities of any sort.

Hammett promptly wrote a story in which he laid a deliberate trap for Joe Shaw.

One of the characters in the story, meeting another one, asked him what he was doing these days, and the other shamefacedly admitted that he was "on the gooseberry lay."

Had the editor known it, this meant simply that the character was making his living by stealing clothes from clotheslines, preferably on a Monday morning. The expression goes back to the old days of the tramp who from time to time needed a few pennies to buy food. He would wait until the housewife had put out her wash; then he would descend on the clothesline, pick up an armful of clothes, and scurry away to sell them.

In the same story, and as part of the same trap, Hammett had another character ask what *he* was doing, and the chap said very proudly that he was now a "gunsel" for such and such an underworld character.

Shaw had the reaction which Hammett had expected. He wrote Ham-

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mett telling him that he was deleting the "gooseberry lay" from the story, that *Black Mask* would never publish anything like that. But he left the word "gunsel" because Hammett had used it so casually that Shaw took it for granted that the word pertained to a hired gunman. Actually, "gunsel," or "gonzel," is a very naughty word with no relation whatever to a bodyguard, a gunman, or a torpedo.

What happened?

All the writers of the hard-boiled school of realism started talking about a gunsel as the equivalent of a gunman. The usage has persisted. Recently, a magazine of national circulation, featuring the death of a gunman, described it on the cover as "The Short, Bitter Life of a Gunsel."

A few years ago I read a book purportedly written by a man who enjoyed a first-hand contact with the underworld—a story of stark realism. The author continually referred to the gunmen as "gunsels."

It has been at least thirty-five years since Dashiell Hammett played his little joke on Captain Joseph T. Shaw, but the after-effects of that joke are still seen in American murder stories.

Then there was the time Hammett went into the office of a magazine which had long been after him for a novelet. Hammett had a hastily written novelet in his overcoat pocket. He submitted it to the editor, who was overjoyed and waited a discreet interval for Hammett to leave.

Finally Hammett said, "Well, aren't you going to read it?"

"Why, yes," the editor said. "I'll get at it right away."

"All right," Hammett said, "I'll wait. If you don't like it, I can take it somewhere else."

So the editor read it and said he liked it.

"All right, then, give me a check," Hammett said. "I believe you do pay on acceptance, don't you?"

The editor explained that his way of doing business was to send out vouchers through the accounting department.

Hammett reached for the manuscript. The harassed editor called the accounting department and ordered a check for Hammett forthwith.

Hammett pocketed the check.

"There are two or three expressions that will have to be deleted from the manuscript," the editor said. "They are a little broad for this magazine, but we'll touch it up."

Hammett drew himself up with dignity. "No one touches a Hammett manuscript except Dashiell Hammett!" he exclaimed, and with a regal gesture swept the manuscript into his pocket. *"I'll* delete those expressions," he said, and stalked out of the office, the check in one pocket, the manuscript in the other.

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The editor sat in open-mouthed confusion.

The inevitable happened. Hammett cashed the check, and cash and Hammett meant but one thing. It was a combination which needed one more ingredient and plenty of ice.

The editor scheduled the manuscript for publication and featured it on the pictorial cover, which was printed in Chicago some time before the printing of the magazine. Then he engaged in a frantic search trying to find Hammett.

Hammett was in no condition to be found. Various people located him and tried to get him going, but as soon as he got going he went in the wrong direction.

Meantime the harassed editor was stuck with the printed covers. He finally had a slip printed explaining that because of illness on the part of Dashiell Hammett the story would appear in a subsequent issue. He hired girls by the hundred to paste these slips on the covers of the magazines. By then it was too late to get new covers.

Happily, one afternoon Hammett attained a measure of sobriety while riding in a taxicab. He pushed his hand down into his overcoat pocket, found the crumpled manuscript, remembered that he had agreed to delete certain expressions, pulled a pencil out of his pocket, scrawled corrections on the manuscript, stopped off at a speakeasy, and paid the cab driver to take the manuscript to the editorial office.

The relieved editor rushed the story into the magazine and hired more girls to pull the printed slips off the covers. It was a great day for the New York unemployed.

It is an interesting commentary on the subconscious that men like to identify themselves vicariously with characters who are devastatingly successful in the field of romance; and women, apparently, are not averse to reading stories of feminine surrender to dominant persons who are ruthlessly masculine. But the minute the relationship becomes sanctioned by convention it tends to lose its literary charm. I learned this the hard way. Years ago I had created a highly successful character who ran for years in the wood-pulp magazines. He was known as Ed Jenkins, the "Phantom Crook."

Jenkins was wanted by the police and hated by the underworld. The police blamed him for crimes they couldn't solve. The underworld egged the police on with phony tips from unscrupulous stool pigeons. Ed Jenkins simply didn't care. He lived a life in the shadows, outwitting both the police and the underworld. He depended solely on quick thinking and diabolical ingenuity. As he frequently expressed it, "The police can

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arrest you for having a gun on you, but they can't arrest you for having your wits about you."

Then the rich, socially prominent Helen Chadwick fell in love with Ed Jenkins. She wanted to have her father use his political influence to get a governor's pardon so that Jenkins could start anew.

Jenkins would apparently toy with this idea while being exposed to Helen's charms, but knowing that he could only bring misfortune to the girl he loved, he would excuse himself for a moment, leave the room, then slip unobtrusively out of some convenient window and vanish once more into the night, wanted by the police, pursued by the underworld.

By the time the next story started, Helen would be making frantic efforts to find him again, would eventually be successful, and would plead with him to let her rehabilitate his good name.

Jenkins would waver, but knowing that in the long run there was no simple solution, knowing that if he married Helen her life would be one of constant danger, he would get her into a position of temporary safety, and then, using ingenuity to outwit crooks and police alike, he would again slip through the fingers of the underworld into the dark alleys he knew so well, detour past the police, and vanish into the depths of San Francisco's Chinatown, where an old Chinese philosopher always gave him shelter.

Eventually, the clamoring pressures of the reading public became too great. Letters of protest came pouring in. I let Ed Jenkins and Helen Chadwick get married.

I started the next story after their marriage, with a scene in which I tried to show some measure of domestic bliss. Ed Jenkins was in a hotel room looking out the window, making a surreptitious survey of the street below, while his bride, the erstwhile Helen Chadwick, was busily ironing her dress.

Captain Joseph T. Shaw, editor of *Black Mask*, sent the story back with a gasp of horror. The idea of having Helen Chadwick without a dress in a hotel room with Ed Jenkins—*Black Mask* would never stand for such a risqué situation as that.

So I got mad and killed Helen off.

It was a horrible thing to do. My daughter wouldn't speak to me for a month. Readers wrote in quivering with indignation.

Captain Shaw accepted her death with equanimity. He probably felt it served the girl right for removing her dress in the presence of her husband.

Dashiell Hammett achieved fame with THE MALTESE FALCON, and shortly after that in THE THIN MAN he discovered that marriage had its

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lighter moments. His detective in THE THIN MAN plunged into bed to enter into a relationship which was legally and morally sanctioned.

Editors woke up to the fact that they had been missing something, and some prelate even preached a sermon based on Hammett's story, pointing out that marriage could be fun.

It was too late to do me any good. I couldn't bring Helen Chadwick back to life.

It is perhaps a commentary on the trend of modern times that the late Ian Fleming, surveying the situation, felt that the solution offered by Dashiell Hammett some thirty-odd years earlier would no longer appeal to the readers.

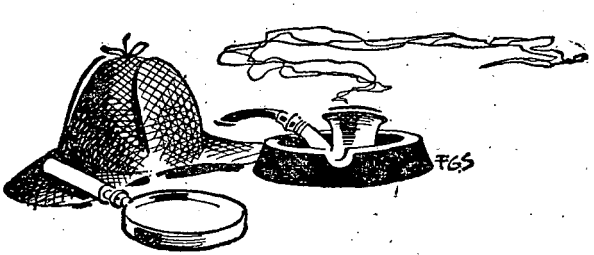
In any event, he had his hero lead with his chin in such a way that his bride of a few hours became defunct. In view of the standards of super-intelligence usually employed by James Bond, the manner in which he betrayed his wife into a fatal trap is almost indicative of the fact that sub-consciously he wanted to get rid of her as fast as Ian Fleming did.

A burnt child dreads the fire.

For some thirty-two years now, Perry Mason and Della Street have been working side by side, each apparently potential matrimonial material, but each far too occupied with the intricacies of the case on which they are working to realize the biological possibilities of the association.

Indignant readers write in and want to know when the pair are going to get married.

As an author I am in love with Della Street. I am not going to kill her off. And when better authors than I am find themselves unable to cope with the problem of a married hero, I'm not going to paint myself into that corner again.



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Erle Stanley Gardner's article (immediately preceding, in this issue) represents the opinion of a famous American detective-story writer. The article by Michael Innes, creator of Sir John Appleby, now the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, represents the opinion of a famous British detective-story writer. It is a strange coincidence that both articles first appeared in American magazines simultaneously—Erle Stanley Gardner's in the January 1965 issue of "The Atlantic Monthly," and Michael Innes' in the January 1965 issue of "Esquire."

Further editorial comment when you have finished reading "Getting Away With Murder" and "Death As a Game" . . .

DEATH AS A GAME

by MICHAEL INNES

WHEN I WAS TWENTY-SEVEN MY FORMER TEACHERS SENT ME OUT TO Australia to be a professor of English literature. I was to be a "full" professor, they explained—which at least suggested that I had been sufficiently stuffed with books. But I had never *written* a book. So I celebrated the occasion by writing and publishing a detective novel.

Thirty years later, I am still a university teacher and I still write detective novels. People sometimes ask me how I manage to combine these activities; and even, what isn't the same thing, how I manage to reconcile them. A first answer is easy. A detective novel takes about four weeks to write, or three months if confined to an hour or two before breakfast, so it gets tucked into a routine as readily as fishing or gardening or billiards. But then I have to go on to say that, Well, at least very few academic people ever seem to have disapproved of this avocation of mine, despite all the bloodshed it has involved. (As a matter of fact, they are much more suspicious when I write a "straight" novel. There seems to be a feeling that this is something a lecturer on Thomas Hardy and Henry James should keep clear of. The detective story, being itself without any claim to "literary" status, is all right.) And then I make the strong point that in England this variety of sensation novel has always been a monumentally respectable form of writing.

I have found that almost nobody on the continent of Europe can understand this. Years ago an Oxford colleague of mine, Lord Cherwell (Winston Churchill's chief scientific adviser during the war, and better known

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to us as the "Prof"), took it into his head that one of my detective stories should be translated into French by a Parisian lady of his acquaintance, and provided with an introduction by the Duc de Broglie. This was sheer benevolence on the Prof's part. The Duc, in addition to *being* a duc, was a physicist of the first eminence, and I have no doubt that his commendations would have given the book a fillip.

The plan only partly fulfilled itself. The story appeared, with the beautifully simple (French) title DANGER! But there was nothing by de Broglie. It was explained to me that a publisher couldn't be found for DANGER! other than as a straight *roman policier*, and that a *roman policier* was something my prospective patron couldn't quite stand up and be counted about, after all.

In England this wouldn't have been the position in the least. If, as is most improbable, a duke had been found to sponsor my effort (the true title of which was THE CASE OF THE JOURNEYING BOY), he wouldn't have boggled at its being *a detective story*. He would have remembered that Dr. Cyril Alington, his old headmaster at Eton and later a dignitary of the Anglican Church, put in a lot of time talking enthusiastically about detective stories, and quite a lot of time writing them as well. If he had happened to go on from Eton to Worcester College in Oxford (a place of higher learning rather fond of Etonians), he would have known that the provost of the college, the distinguished historian Mr. J. C. Masterman, also wrote detective stories. (Masterman once produced an apocryphal Sherlock Holmes story turning on a nasty poisoning: in the course of it Holmes says, "Alimentary, my dear Watson.") If he were a learned or even just a pious duke, he would also have known that Monsignor Ronald Knox, later the Roman Catholic Church's chosen translator of the New Testament into English, was another author of such things. So my duke would have had no occasion to feel that he was reaching down into an underworld of letters in order to give me a leg up.

Certainly the *reading* of detective stories has for long been in vogue among what have come to be called in England (with half-hearted facetiousness) Top People. Friends with a larger access to Top People than has ever been mine have sometimes thought to gratify me by murmuring how they have come upon this most eminent of statesmen, or even that most eminent of poets or philosophers, absorbed in one of my stories. In point of fact, I derive only a very imperfect pleasure from these reports, since I find myself wishing—no doubt perversely—that I could instruct, edify and impress these august personages, rather than merely entertain them. But since they must read stories by more famous detective writers far more frequently than they read mine, it seems necessary to conclude

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that a large part of their lighter reading lies in this field. And, indeed, there is evidence that such things can become a sort of drug of addiction among intellectuals. Psychoanalytical theories of the detective story have been evolved to explain the compulsive character that such reading can assume. For example, Miss Krag has maintained that the murder is a symbolic equivalent of "the primal scene," by which is meant the violent and mysterious affair transacting itself in the parental bedchamber. The detective is the inquisitive child, and the murderer is Daddy. It seems doubtful whether this much helps to explain why some highly intellectual people—Bertrand Russell, for example—consume a great many detective stories. I myself have escaped this voyeurism—if it's that—by adopting the active role of *writing* the things. I haven't *read* a detective story for years.

It is possible that a good deal of what I have been saying applies chiefly to the past. Indeed, I am pretty sure that this is so. In England the respectability of the detective story has been declining. Top People have gone off it. Younger members of the Cabinet don't take stacks of these mysteries in their baggage as they charge around the world annoying people. The newer philosophers read science fiction. The up-and-coming poets haven't heard of you. You are no longer much talked about even during tea at the vicarage. Or such is my impression.[1]

What has happened is that the thriller (as we may now, blurring an ancient distinction, begin to call it) has democratized itself. It has become a subdepartment of something called Crime Fiction. I am myself horrified at being credited with writing Crime Fiction —and for complex reasons. Partly, it is a matter of my training as a student of literature. Aeschylus could write Crime Fiction—and Shakespeare and Dostoevski and (in a way) Dickens. But it isn't for lesser talents. "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery," Jane Austen wrote, rather famously, in MANSFIELD PARK. She was perfectly right.

A world in which everybody is liable to murder anybody else (and this is the prime datum of the thriller) can't but be so full of guilt and misery that only Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and the others rolled into one could hope to cope with it. If, that is to say, it were allowed to be any sort of *real* world. And this brings us to the "rules." The "classical" detective story has, or had, a lot of rules. The more obvious of these concern things like playing fair: the detective mustn't notice things the reader isn't told about his noticing, and so forth. But there is another—a concealed and all-important—rule. Nothing *real* must be allowed in. Let your

[1]EDITORS' NOTE: We honestly believe that Mr. Innes' impression is incorrect.

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guilt and misery, for instance, be real and you crack the mold of the form.

When I wrote that first detective novel I was quite aware of this. It was called DEATH AT THE PRESIDENT'S LODGING, and was all about something I could have been entirely realistic on: dons in an Oxford college. (My American publisher, Mr. Dodd, a little obscured this, as far as the title went; he felt that Washington, D.C., might be brought delusively into the minds of his compatriots, and suggested SEVEN SUSPECTS instead.) Well, I knew it mustn't be a *real* college. So I invented one, and called it St. Antony's. (There *is* now a real St. Antony's in Oxford, but they must have got it from my book.) And I knew that the people mustn't be real, nor the plot either. So I made the whole thing more fantastic than you'd believe. Even so, I wasn't satisfied. I felt that my having grasped the true *ethos* of the detective story had better be underlined in a preface. A preface is something detective yarns don't commonly have. But I wrote one. And in it I said, finally, of St. Antony's: "Its Fellows are fantasy all —without substance and without (forbearing Literary reader!) any mantle of imaginative truth to cover their nakedness. Here are ghosts; here is a purely speculative scene of things."

Notice how I'd already got the habit of parentheses. Notice that the last clause smuggles in a quotation from Charles Lamb. And notice that this mannered and wholly artificial approach to guilt and misery made my modest fortune, such as it was to be. I had grasped the fact that the detective story must be paper thin—like any other paper game.

It is very arguable that the English detective story has adopted in all this a frustrating and debilitating convention. I seem to recall that the late Raymond Chandler believed so; he made fun of a squeamish insistence that all your blood is no more than red ink. Carried to an extreme, it is a canon of taste that certainly militates against any very lively entertainment. Dr. Alington, for instance, believed that a good deal was likely to turn upon some such catastrophe as the stealing of the cathedral plate. This is sacrilege, I suppose, and therefore a most heinous crime. But scarcely one to sit up all night with.

Still, it *is* some canon of taste that is involved. To show how it has weighed upon me I must tell two stories.

Not long after publishing SEVEN SUSPECTS, and before I was known to be its author, I made a railway journey in Australia with two companions, a judge and a geologist. The judge began talking about detective stories, in which he appeared to be well-read, and he explained that he liked them to answer to his own experience of the law. Police procedure ought to be accurately described—that sort of thing. I tried to argue

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against this heresy (as I conceived it), and so the geologist was appealed to. He said he didn't read detective stories. The judge rallied him on this. They are first-rate entertainment, so why didn't he? The geologist was also an explorer; he had performed notable feats of endurance and heroism in the Antarctic; he was a most impressive person all round. And now he flushed and hesitated like the inarticulate English gentleman he was—and finally he muttered that after all, you know, when you come to think of it, murder is a pretty rotten sort of thing.

I was a good deal struck by this.

Years later, I became a member of a dining club restricted to mystery writers. It had been started by G. K. Chesterton, the inventor of Father Brown, and in my time it was presided over by Dorothy L. Sayers. At my first appearance I found that there was an initiation ceremony. Among other things, one took an oath not to do this and that: not, for instance, to write a story turning on identical twins. Being donnish and intellectually arrogant, I thought poorly of this; indeed, the next day I started NIGHT OF ERRORS, a mystery novel turning on triplets. But the oath-taking didn't offend me. Neither did the first of two unusual objects decorating the long table at the Café Royale: a skull. I think I'd have drawn the line at drinking out of it, but as a mere embellishment of a banquet a skull is traditional enough. The second object at first merely puzzled me. It was a coil of rope. Eventually I realized it was meant to be the hangman's rope.

Well, I don't know what you feel. But I know what the guest of honor that evening felt. He was a barrister who had made a distinguished career in the criminal law, and it was his duty to make a speech to us. He told how, as a young man, he had once defended a woman charged with murder. His plea failed, and she was sentenced to death. It was a small assize court in a provincial town, with inadequate accommodation, and there was some hitch about getting the condemned woman off to prison. Her howling was audible in court throughout the rest of the day.

This may be taken as a parable about holding cheap what is most dear; about scrawling one's superficial fictions over the surface of such deeps. Or it may be taken as merely technical. The detective story is all right for just as long as that howl isn't heard. "*Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?*" Mr. Edmund Wilson has asked. As usual, he is dead on the spot. It wouldn't at all do *to care*. Who murdered old Karamazov? Was it Smerdyakov? Was it—if we think hard enough—really Mitya, although Mitya actually took a swipe only at the servant Grigory? Was it Ivan, although—or just because—he had made himself scarce? Or is Alyosha's view the right one, and is each of us accountable for the crimes of all?

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These are questions we *care* about. But not about Roger Ackroyd.

I've here ventured far enough, perhaps, on the theme of moral taste. There are other reasons why the detective writer does best to keep to the conventions and the flats and the shallows. As the intricacy and ingenuity of plots increase, the persons subserving them almost necessarily become less and less recognizable human beings—for if the game is to be really exciting, anybody in the story must be capable of acting under any motive and to any end. Whereas the question posed by the novel proper is, "What will these people do *now*,?" the question posed by the detective story is, "What did these people do *then*?" And the value of what they did *then* consists essentially in their actions, when revealed, striking us with the highest degree of unexpectedness at all compatible with plausibility.

Here is the main obstacle to achieving what, following Dorothy L. Sayers, I've had a shot at often enough: blending the detective story with "straight" fiction, so as to achieve a distinct kind with some literary substance. It doesn't work. As soon as I start *caring*—or even just exploring in a disinterested way—the thing goes wrong. If, for instance, I start saying a good word for my criminal, explaining that he has a kind heart and has been wronged by society and endured a most unhappy childhood, I am soon left floundering. My reader, instead of saying, "How harrowing!" or "What deep knowledge of the human heart!," simply says, "Oh, so *he's* your criminal!" And he closes the book.

So let me face it. The people in mystery stories cannot be made very interesting in themselves,[2] although lively writing can make them amusing in certain limited and superficial ways. They are never being examined as characters are examined in good novels. What is being examined is simply, say, where they were at midnight when the shot was heard, or why they turned pale and sank down on a sofa when they heard that the butler had forgotten to fill up the whiskey decanter in the baronet's library. While—don't forget—the snow was falling in the park outside.

Back to the "classical" form, then, and try again. The grand difficulty, needless to say, is to think up something new. For the whole territory is one in which the law of diminishing returns is deplorably evident: more and more tortured ingenuity by writers; less and less gratified astonishment in readers.

What seems to be chiefly required in this increasingly difficult situation is a high degree of alertness—maintained, if possible, round the clock. Thus there is an admirable novel by Dorothy L. Sayers which turns on hemophilia: an abnormality of the blood which prevents it from quickly

[2]Editors' Note: Again we honestly believe that Mr. Innes' impression is incorrect.

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clotting on exposure to air, as ordinary blood fortunately does. How did she come by the germ of this story? Monsignor Knox once told me.

The British Broadcasting Corporation had hit on the idea of a serial detective story, the episodes of which were to be provided by a number of writers succeeding one another in turn. These people had a meeting to discuss the general plan of the enterprise, and the first writer said he was proposing to have a great pool of blood come flowing from under a curtain, so that it islanded a group of bridge players intent on their game. A second writer said, "I don't believe you *could* get a great pool of blood like that." And a third said, "I'm sure you couldn't—unless the dead man was a hemophiliac or something." Dorothy L. Sayers had been listening attentively—she always did—but she made no contribution to the discussion at this point. Instead, she was observed by Monsignor Knox to look thoughtful, to bring out a pocketbook, and to make a little note. A seminal idea had come to her.

As Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gipsy said in another connection, it needs heaven-sent moments for such skill. But, of course, detective novels, indifferently "classical," can be turned out by sheer plod. I sent off my twenty-sixth to Mr. Dodd the other day. Should you chance upon it (*forbearing Literary reader*) please remember: *Here are ghosts; here is a purely speculative scene of things.*

EDITORS' NOTE: As you now know, both Erle Stanley Gardner and Michael Innes are concerned with and about (among other important matters) the relative realism of detective fiction. Mr. Gardner says: "The hard-boiled school of realism likes to claim that it is writing of things as they are, but I believe that much of its work is the result of the sheer imagination of frustrated individuals." Mr. Innes says: "But there is another—a concealed and all-important—rule. Nothing *real* must be allowed in."

May we comment on both views by repeating the last paragraph we wrote for the Editors' Note in ELLERY QUEEN'S 1965 ANTHOLOGY: MWA Presidents Edition: "The century-old dilemma of the mystery writer has been (paraphrasing Yeats) simply this: to write about the real world but put imaginary things in it—or to create an imaginary world but put real things in it." And then we went on to pay sincere tribute to those who, thanks to Poe, Doyle, and so many others, have heroically, and with their own "fearless truth," chosen the latter course—to create an imaginary world but put real things in it.

So now you know where Messrs. Gardner, Innes, and Queen stand . . .

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Meet Mr. Cyriack Skinner Grey, a new scientific sleuth and perhaps the first wheelchair (as distinguished from armchair) detective—at least, the first wheelchair detective to appear in EQMM. And meet Lieutenant Trask, a sort of "human shaggy dog." And meet the immobilized detective's assistant—his 14-year-old son, with an I.Q. of 180, who serves as the scientist's legs . . .

The first of a new series, carrying on the grand 'tec tradition of the howdunit . . .

THE SCIENTIST AND THE BAGFUL OF WATER

by ARTHUR PORGES

"A LITTLE BAG OF WATER," LIEUTENant Trask said in a troubled voice, "and a man's dead. It's pretty far-fetched, if you ask me, and awfully damned convenient for Preston Forbes Whitney, Junior." He almost spat the last word.

Cyriack Skinner Grey, very erect in his wheelchair, which glittered with several dozen mechanical and electrical gadgets of his own invention, snapped, "How little?" Like Lord Kelvin, Grey was a firm believer in exact measurement. "Water's heavy, and almost incompressible, remember."

If there was a hint of pomposity in his statement, it was only natural, because before becoming a freelance crime consultant, Grey—a brilliant research scientist—had also taught graduate courses in physics. Then a bad fall while mountain climbing had damaged his spinal cord, putting him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Thanks to a number of valuable patents, Grey had no financial problems. He had promptly converted his old rambling house into a huge laboratory, with ramps instead of stairs, and enough expensive equipment to satisfy a university. His only assistant was his 14-year-old son, Edgar; Grey's wife had died some years before.

"I checked with an unbroken bag of the same size," Lieutenant Trask said, feeling a small glow of pleasure as Grey nodded approval. He had once been the scientist's pupil, courtesy of the Police Academy, and knew the worth of Grey's approval. "It will hold about two pounds of water."

"Then it's a simple matter to settle," the scientist said, reaching for the 20-inch slide rule resting in

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brackets on the side of his wheelchair. But he stopped his motion halfway, and said, "Hell, it's just a little mental arithmetic; I don't need this. What floor of the hotel was the bag dropped from?"

"The convention occupied the nineteenth, but some of those jokers could have operated from other places—corridor windows or fire escapes—above or below that level. Naturally, nobody will admit ever hearing of such tricks—not a practical joker in the crowd!—now that a man's dead."

"We'll assume nineteen, then—say, a hundred and sixty feet. Time of fall, about three seconds: one sixty over sixteen is the square of the time, remember. So velocity at ground, ninety-six feet per second. Energy of hitting man—one half mass times square of velocity—hum—two hundred and eighty-eight foot-pounds." He gave Trask a quizzical glance. "Your victim was hit, so to speak, by a weight of over two hundred pounds falling one foot; or to make it more understandable, say, twenty pounds dropping ten feet. Certainly enough to kill a man."

"Oh, it's reasonable enough," the Lieutenant admitted gloomily. "But too convenient for his partner—this Whitney, Junior I mentioned."

"Where does he come in?"

"He comes into a fortune, I'm afraid."

"Just how?"

"He was James Connors' partner in the business, which is worth quite a few millions. Not that he contributed much; but his father was an old friend of Connors', and bought the boy a share some years back. Junior was never any good; now he's a tubby playboy, about as much use to the firm as a price war.

"Anyhow, he and Connors argued and fought a good deal; Whitney was always trying for some angle to increase his take—gambling, foreign cars, and fast women kept him broke. The older man wasn't buying that; the business needed every penny for expansion; the future could be really big if the firm wasn't milked dry. He'd've liked to buy Junior out, but couldn't make it now—not if his ten-year plan was to work out.

"Well, Connors often took a short cut to the parking lot by going through an alley behind the Regency Hotel. That night, Whitney was along. There was this convention—the WOWS—World-Wide Organization of Wolverines, a benevolent association with the usual hard core of swag-bellied, retread delinquents. They'd been dropping bags of water from the upper floors. We warned them it could be dangerous, and the leaders promised to keep the members in line; but you know how it is. Nobody can really control some of those old clowns when they're full of liquor."

"And one of the bags struck and killed Connors?"

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"That's what Junior says. He claims they were going through the alley when he hears something come down with a swish; then there was a smacking sound, Connors staggered, grabbed his head with both hands, and collapsed. Whitney yelled for help, and in a few minutes quite a crowd gathered. When one of our cruisers came, Connors was dead, his head and shoulders soaked—no blood, more like a sandbagging—also his jacket; and there was this torn, wet, empty bag on the blacktop."

"Hmmph!" Grey snorted. "Seems pretty convincing, doesn't it?"

"It would—if Junior planned it that way. Suppose he read about the hi-jinks—the WOWS are in town for a week, you know—and deliberately prepared for a kill. He could have clubbed Connors, and set the stage easily enough."

"He'd need some water to pour over the body."

"He could bring that in a flask. It was a chilly night, and Junior wore a topcoat. Connors was pretty warm-blooded, and didn't wear a coat. Maybe Whitney took his to conceal the flask and whatever he used for a club. Wish I'd searched him on the spot, but we just took his statement and let him go; it seemed pretty clear-cut, then.

"I didn't know," Trask added grimly, "what his status in the firm was. For that matter, he would have had plenty of time, before anybody showed up in answer to his yells, to get rid of all the evidence. You can carry water in one of those plastic fish bags that the pet stores use; it crumples up to the size of a peanut when empty."

"What about the club?"

"Hell, anything would do. A fist-sized stone, wrapped in a corner of his coat, so as not to break his skin and draw blood. Then he could simply toss the stone away, and nobody could ever prove it had been used. Or a sockful of dirt. Empty it, and toss the sock a dozen yards away in one of the hotel trash cans."

"All you have, really," Grey pointed out in a dry voice, "is a hypothesis based largely on dislike and suspicion of this Whitney, Junior. It could be true—but so could the innocent, obvious theory of a stupid conventioneer. I don't see where I come in."

"I don't either—I was just hoping," the Lieutenant admitted. "I almost had him, I thought, for a while there. I learned that the Regency Hotel had purposely turned off all the water on the convention floor early that evening—trying to teach the visiting firemen a lesson."

"Well?"

"You can't stop a practical joker that easily," Trask said. "There were the toilet flushboxes, and a few full pitchers left. The hotel soon gave it up as hopeless, and turned the water back on. That was after Connors got killed."

The scientist was silent for a moment, his black, almost lusterless

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eyes hooded. Then he said, "The autopsy showed a fractured skull, I suppose."

"Right. Doc Perkins says a bag of water could have done it. But he admits that so could a lot of other things."

"His hair and jacket were wet, you say?"

"Yes."

"Blacktop, too?"

"Yes, but not much. After all, it was only a small bag of water. But enough to make the point. Junior didn't goof there. A dry blacktop, and I'd've had him cold. I'll bet my seniority he spilled water over Connors, over the blacktop, even on the torn bag, before calling out for help."

"Maybe," Grey said. "But you've no proof—not a scrap."

"I guess it's hopeless," the Lieutenant said, getting up to go. "I had a hunch it would be. The easiest way to kill anybody, as every cop knows, is to stage a convincing 'accident.' There may be oodles of suspicion, but in simple situations a jury's always reluctant to assume criminal intent. And when a car's involved," he added wryly, "each juror figures—how rightly!—that he may kill somebody one day himself, and wouldn't want to be considered a murderer just for being drunk and doing a measly fifteen miles an hour over the legal limit."

"True," Grey said. "If I wanted to kill somebody, I'd 'accidentally' back over him on a driveway, or drop a brick from the roof while fixing the chimney, or stumble against the ladder he was on. Nothing to it.

"However, let's not throw in the towel yet. Let me think about it for another day or two. It didn't seem possible for Pasteur to hit on a way to isolate one miserable little bacterium from fifty thousand other kinds, all in the same drop, but it turned out to be very simple—once he thought of smearing a culture plate, and allowing each species to begin a new colony. Merely a matter of dilution."

Grey dexterously wheeled his chair to the door, disdaining the use of the electric motor—rechargable, of course—in the base. "If I come up with anything remotely helpful, I'll call you. But better not hold your breath," he added, wooden-faced.

Ordinarily, Lieutenant Trask never left Grey without feeling a distinct surge of hope. The scientist had a genius for breaking difficult cases, and he enjoyed the mental exercise, which was not so different from his normal brainwork but had a human element to add spice. It was ostensibly a matter of logic and scientific method; but actually it was nearer poetry, because imagination played so large a role.

The basic concept had to come first—the identification with the criminal and his gimmick—then the application of laboratory science to

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verification, and—as both men hoped—proof suitable for non-technical jurors. On the other hand, it was Grey's extensive background in all branches of organized knowledge that made his "hunches" fruitful.

But in this case Trask felt no lift of hope. He was asking the impossible, and he knew it. What had happened in that dimly lit alley could never be known for certain. Only an eyewitness could disprove Whitney's account, and there was no witness. The area had been deserted. Even if one of the convention guests had been looking down, there was nothing significant he could have seen in the dark alley from so many floors up. To have spotted the murder, an observer would have had to be within a few feet of the two men; and Junior had made mighty sure nobody was that close when he struck.

Keep it simple—a plausible accident—that was the secret of a successful murder. Those were the kind that went undetected year after year. You didn't find them in the statistics; only the stupid and impulsive killers ever get caught, Trask thought unhappily. No, Preston Forbes Whitney, Junior, would soon control—and probably ruin—a multimillion-dollar business, and was beyond the reach of the law.

Some policemen would have shrugged all this off; win a few; lose a lot. But Lieutenant Trask was a dedicated man, and he hated killers; or, to be more fair to him, he hated killing; for there were murderers he could understand, feel sorry for, and not hate at all. Junior was not so privileged; the crime was too cold-blooded; the victim had been a nice guy.

One day went by, and the Lieutenant tried to lose himself in the details of a new case, but his heart was still in the old one, hopeless as it seemed.

Then Grey phoned. The scientist came gruffly to the point.

"Still got Connors' jacket?" he barked.

"His jacket?" Trask was bewildered for a moment. "I guess we have. There was no reason to rush it back to the heirs."

"Heirs?" Grey sounded indignant; he hated being deprived of possibly relevant facts. "But I thought Whitney—"

"He gets control of the business—and that was a damned silly arrangement: an invitation for him to murder Connors. But there are plenty of other assets for sisters, cousins, and aunts. Plus what they can salvage of the firm before Junior bleeds it to death."

"I see. Not that it's relevant. But if you have the jacket, I'll send Edgar over for it."

"Certainly. But what good—?"

"I'll explain that later—if the notion pays off. Been talking to the Maintenance Chief at the Regency; very intelligent chap, by the way.

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We may have a chance, after all. Edgar'll be right over." And Grey hung up, leaving Trask in a mood that was no longer entirely hopeless.

He should have waited for another call from Grey, but instead, after clearing up several tiresome but essential details on pending cases, he drove out to Grey's house at a clip that made more than one traffic cop do a double take before recognizing the figure at the wheel.

Edgar, a red-haired imp who looked like a mischievous kid fresh from a sandlot infield, but had an I.Q. of 180, admitted him. They were old friends; and if Edgar thought of Trask as a worthy, if not too bright, familiar of his father's—a human shaggy dog—the detective thought of Edgar as a likeable middle-aged genius, masquerading as a boy. Since both played the game, and kept such subversive ideas to themselves, the atmosphere remained genial.

Grey was not so cordial at first; he frowned as Trask came into the big lab. Then his face relaxed, and his mobile lips twitched briefly. It was one of his prime virtues that he seldom forgot the vital difference between young blood, hot and hasty, and his own, rather older, and cooled by rigorous training.

"As it happens, you're not too early—quite," he said, leaning back in the wheelchair.

"Then your idea did pay off!" Trask exclaimed, his face glowing. "What did you learn from the jacket? It's been driving me nuts all day, trying to guess."

"It occurred to me," Grey said, "that a hotel, what with cooking needs and the prevalence of drip-dry syndromes among the guests, would use soft water, especially in this area, where it's normally fairly hard. I had Edgar check: the Regency Hotel does use soft water."

"Soft water?" Trask repeated doubtfully. "I know the term, but just what does it mean?"

"We'll get to that in a minute. The point is, an office building, like Connors', would not be likely to bother. No cooking—just washrooms. Drinking water probably in coolers. Anyhow, I had Edgar get a sample from the Connors building. No water softening used."

He saw that Trask had a question trembling on his lips, and didn't wait to hear it. "Artificially softened water usually contains certain chemicals. Silicates, in this case. They're filtered out—in theory—before the liquid gets to the consumer, but enough traces are bound to remain for special tests. The water that soaked Connors' jacket was hard water—had never been softened. *So it could not possibly have come from the Hotel Regency.*

"My guess is, Whitney filled the flask you hypothesized in the office of the Connors Building where he worked; it would have been silly to carry it from his home. It might

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even be," he added cautiously, "that you could tie the water directly to his office with spectroscopic tests; but that's hardly necessary, since now his story is proved clearly false. The water did not come from the hotel; so it doesn't really matter where it did come from."

"You're so right!" Trask breathed. "We've got him cold."

"You still have to convince a jury."

"This isn't so involved that any normal person can't follow it," Trask said confidently. "Simple scientific logic."

He gave Edgar a suspicious glance; the imp was grinning. Trask then looked at Grey, who pointed a finger at the boy in mock reproof.

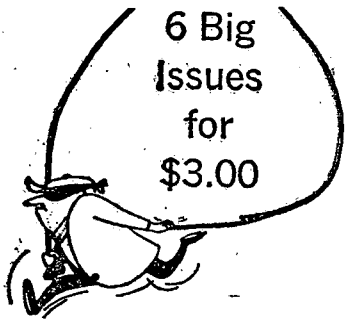
"Don't say it, Edgar. Some jurors *can* follow simple scientific logic—so don't be smug."

"I should have known better," the Lieutenant said, almost to himself. "I thought it was hopeless—that even you were stumped this time." He sighed. "Will I ever learn?"

"Don't be silly," Grey snapped. "I'm bound to fail some time."

"I'm glad I won't live to see the day," Trask deadpanned.

EDITORS' NOTE: The second case about Cyriack Skinner Grey, modern scientific detective, is titled *The Scientist and the Wife Killer*. It will appear in EQMM soon . . .



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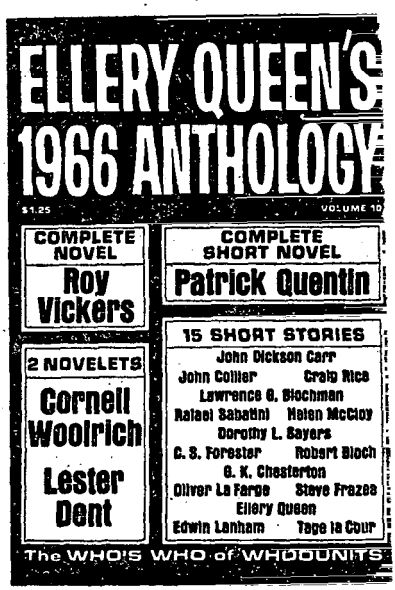

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The first USSR detective novel to appear here, Julian Semyonov's PETROVKA 38, translated by Michael Scammel (Stein & Day, $4.95), is a highly competent story of police procedure, demonstrating that crooks and cops and civilians differ little in Commander Gideon's London, in Detective Carella's 87th Precinct, or in Major Sadchikov's Moscow—and further demonstrating that free interchange of the so-called "literature of violence" could be one of the strongest moves to promote understanding and peace.

★★★★★ **ELLERY QUEEN'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL** (Random, $4.95)
3 novelets and 17 shorts from the magazine year 1964 add up to one of the finest volumes in the history of this hardy perennial.

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A gem of a short-short — one for the (anthology) books

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR JOB SEEKER

by CHARLES McINTOSH

WHEN I WALKED INTO THE dingy office of Murphy Investigators, Inc., I found ten job seekers already waiting in the tiny anteroom, and the secretary hadn't shown up. I glanced at my watch. 8:30. It looked as if she would definitely be late this morning. Then I surveyed the applicants. Since there was only one straight chair and a short bench, only four of them were sitting, while the other six stood around nervously, some meeting my gaze and some avoiding it. They were a motley crew, which shows what comes out of the woodwork when an advertisement is placed for "Private Investigator, Top Rates, Permanent Employment, Opportunity for Partnership Later."

Well, it was time to get started with the elimination. I flipped my hat accurately onto the halltree and strode to the door of the inner office. I found the right key among the couple dozen locksmith's keys I keep on the ring—matter of business, you know—and turned to say, "Will the first applicant please come in?"

I went to the desk and sat down. As the first man paused hesitantly in the doorway I said, rather irritably—I had been up late the night before doing two special assignments—"Well, come in, come in. And shut the door behind you."

The applicant hastily did as he was told—too hastily. Here, I knew, was a man badly in need of a job. I'd seen the type before—small-time operatives down on their luck for a few months, running out of money and running out of courage at the same time. A private detective can't afford to have his nerve shaken.

"Name?" I asked perfunctorily.

"Er—Robbins. Lowell Robbins, sir."

"How much did you have to drink last night, Robbins?"

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"How much did you drink? Your eyes are puffy, you cut yourself shaving, and your fingers are trembling. Never mind answering. You won't do—not for this agency. Good day."

The next one was an oldie. He'd spruced himself to look—he hoped—ten years younger. I think he'd even used a little face powder. But I figured him at least 65, maybe 70. He held himself with conscious

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dignity as I looked over his references.

"Good papers, Mr. Jordan, and you've worked for some good agencies—but too long ago. This kind of job calls for a younger man—one who can stay up all night two or three nights in a row, if necessary. You miss your ten o'clock beddy-bye and you'll be ready for the hospital next day."

"But, sir, I assure you—"

"Sorry, Pop. Send in the next one on your way out, will you?"

The next one was young—and cocky. I've learned you can't be cocky in this business, just careful. I'm a good op, so I can recognize the poor ones. To put him in his place, I asked, "What do you know about this agency, young man? What kind of work does it do? How many people in the agency? What kind of man does that ad call for?"

He was flabbergasted, and floundered around. "Why—why, I don't know. I guess I sort of thought you might tell me that."

"Then why don't you sort of wander out that door again? If I were you and applying for this job, I would have done a lot of preliminary checking up before trying to land a job where checking up on people is the main business."

The next one was another rumdum, and the one after that, a filthy pig with egg on his tie. The other five weren't much better. I sighed to think how the profession seemed to be degenerating. Not one of them showed BRASS. I always think of the word that way, capitalized, because to me BRASS stands for the qualities I've tried to develop in becoming a top operative myself. If you're interested, the letters stand for Brains, Risk-taking, Alertness, Speed, and Subtlety. In everything I do—professionally, that is—I check my actions over to make sure they contain BRASS.

No one else came in the door, so I got up and went into the anteroom. It was empty. And the secretary still hadn't come. I sat down on the bench and lighted a cigar, wondering if any more applicants would show up. It was a good job, all right, and should have been attractive to a number of persons who had read the ad. But only a top man would get the job.

Then the outer door opened, and a conservatively dressed man about 40 walked in. He was alert, intelligent-looking, and in perfect possession of himself. I could tell right away he had BRASS, just like me. I liked him at once, and knew we'd work well together. He saw me, and seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"I'm awfully sorry to be so late. The damnedest thing happened to me this morning." He looked around at the empty anteroom. "Say, I'm surprised not to see any others here. That's a pretty good job in the advertisement."

I pretended to ignore the last remark, and asked, "That's intrigu-

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ing—what you started to say, I mean. What did happen to you this morning?"

"Funniest thing. Someone broke into my garage last night—very cleverly, since he didn't leave a trace. I only found out about it this morning when the car wouldn't start. The mechanic took forty minutes to trace the trouble—a missing distributor rotor. Can you beat that? And while the mechanic was looking for the trouble, my girl called and said her car wouldn't start, either. Odd, decidedly odd."

Then he said, more briskly, "But I imagine you'd rather talk about this job than about my misfortunes, eh? A job like this requires a clever, experienced, painstaking man who knows every angle. Would you say you qualify?"

"I believe I can convince you of that, Mr. Murphy," I said, while my fingers toyed idly with the two distributor rotors in my pocket.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Birkley, Dolan	THE UNLOVED	Doubleday & Company	$3.50	10/22
Blackburn, John	A WREATH OF ROSES	Wm. Morrow & Co.	$3.50	10/15
Borgenicht, Miriam	TO BORROW TROUBLE	Doubleday & Co.	$3.50	10/1
Carr, John Dickson	THE HOUSE AT SATAN'S ELBOW	Harper & Row	$3.95	10/6
Cory, Desmond	DEADFALL	Walker & Company	$4.95	10/8
Creasey, John	MURDER, LONDON-AUSTRALIA	Chas. Scribner's Sons	$3.50	10/14
Davis, Dorothy Salisbury	THE PALE BETRAYER	Chas. Scribner's Sons	$3.50	9/29
Fallon, Martin	THE KEYS OF HELL	Abelard-Schuman	$3.50	10/21
Ford, Corey	A PECULIAR SERVICE	Little, Brown & Co.	$6.75	10/14
Freeling, Nicolas	DOUBLE BARREL	Harper & Row	$3.95	10/6
Gardner, Erle Stanley	UNTITLED PERRY MASON MYSTERY	Wm. Morrow & Co.	$3.50	9/29
Gruber, Frank	LITTLE HERCULES	E. P. Dutton & Co.	$3.95	10/27
Hadfield, John	A CHAMBER OF HORRORS	Little, Brown & Co.	$7.95	10/6
Harvester, Simon	ASSASSINS ROAD	Walker & Company	$3.50	10/24
Hitchcock, Alfred	ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS: STORIES NOT FOR THE NERVOUS	Random House	$5.95	10/14
Kelly, Mary	MARCH TO THE GALLOWS	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	$3.50	9/30
Marsh, Ngaio	BLACK BEECH AND HONEYDEW	Little, Brown & Co.	$5.95	9/28
O'Malley, Patrick	THE AFFAIR OF THE BLUE PIG	Wm. Morrow & Co.	$3.50	10/1
Ordway, Peter	NIGHT OF RECKONING	Simon & Schuster	$3.50	10/8
Queen, Ellery	THE FOURTH SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE	Random House	$3.95	10/8

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If Pierre Choulot's car had not broken down, the mystery in the sleepy little village might never have been solved. Shall we join the regulars in the Bugle Dolphins, a typical English pub?

THE TECCOMESHIRE FEN MYSTERY

by CATHIE HAIG STAR

TECCOMESHIRE FEN, LATER TO BE-come the scene of the crime, was one of those sleepy English villages that the world usually passed by. My traveling companion and I had meant to do just that, but Fate had other plans. At least, I like to think it was Fate that brought my friend to that quiet town in time to see justice done.

We were returning from the north of England, where we had tracked down a desperate criminal —whom Scotland Yard had been fruitlessly trying to capture—and we were looking forward to telling our friend Carstone J. Pipp of Scotland Yard all about it when the motor of our car began to make ominous sounds, culminating in no sound at all.

We looked at each other baffled; crime solvers extraordinary we might be, but auto mechanics we were not. In the time-honored way of men who know nothing of the workings of engines, we lifted the hood and peered inside.

Just then a battered truck came by, slowed and halted. A handsome young blond giant alighted and came toward us.

"Trouble?" he asked. "Motors are my line."

"But how fortunate, m'sieu!" exclaimed my friend. "We have indeed the trouble! Look you, the motor will not go, after making the noises most strange."

The young giant looked, nodded sagely, and began to rummage in the back of his truck. From among a litter of tools, stained cloths, and spare parts, he extracted a hook and chain, by means of which he proceeded to fasten our vehicle to the rear end of his.

"I can put it right in an hour or two," he said. He towed us to the heart of the village, where a sign reading *Rikell's Garage* proclaimed our immediate destination, as well as the name of our rescuer.

We asked Rikell where we might find refreshment while awaiting the repairs, and he pointed down the street. "That's the Bugle Dolphins," he informed us. "They'll make you comfortable."

We took our leave and turned our steps toward this old English pub, to pass our time as best we could until the car should be ready. The street was utterly deserted,

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with not even a parked car to mar the vista to the little woods at the other end of the high street.

We were soon comfortably settled; and I smiled appreciatively at the charming barmaid who took our orders. When I caught my friend's eye I blushed with annoyance, for he insists that I am easy prey for every pretty girl. Still, this one *was* a lovely and enchanting-looking creature, not only blonde and blue-eyed, but with an air of sweetness as well. I said as much when she was out of earshot.

"Ah, Stangish," he twinkled at me, straightening an ashtray on the table that was slightly askew, "always the pretty girl, even if she has the soul of a murderess."

I was about to defend myself hotly, when the landlord who, we discovered, was known as Dad Thornell to the regulars, brought us our drinks—the inevitable sirop for my friend and a whiskey for me. We learned that the pretty girl was his niece and that her name was Gerryl Pitt.

Thornell joined us with a tankard of ale and seemed disposed to gossip further. His niece had evidently been fond of one Ted Hoby, not a local lad but a gentleman who occasionally put up at the pub and did some outdoor painting. For a while marriage banns had seemed to hover, and then, mysteriously, the two became cool to each other. At first Gerryl had seemed depressed, but lately had become more like her normal self. If she wasn't in high good spirits, at least she was contented.

"Strange," my friend murmured softly to himself, "to me she does not look contented."

I don't think Thornell heard, for at that moment several people burst into the pub in a state of considerable agitation, and it was some little time before we could learn what it was all about.

Eventually the leader of the excited men emerged as one Dr. Gillian Coaty, local dignitary, and at approximately the same time the cause of the excitement became apparent to us. Ted Hoby, erstwhile sweetheart of Miss Pitt, had been found in a clump of bushes nearby, shot through the heart! I looked quickly at the girl, who was visibly distressed.

My companion at once bounced into the middle of the commotion. "But how fortunate for you that I am here!" he said. "I am Pierre Choulot."

He did not amplify this statement, taking it for granted that everybody in England had heard of his great detective prowess. His assumption that his pronouncement would produce awe made me, as on similar occasions, somewhat embarrassed for him. Small, with an egg-shaped head and enormous (some have said ridiculous) mustaches, the figure that my little Belgian friend cut was not as universally

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impressive as he persisted in thinking.

Still, he was not without his own kind of dignity and I could see that the local inhabitants viewed him with mixed emotions. Happily Dr. Coaty, who seemed to be more or less in charge, *had* heard of Choulot and was suitably enthralled.

"What a stroke of luck!" exclaimed the doctor. "Our chaps are good men, none better, but murder's not really in their line. We don't have crime in Teccomeshire Fen."

"But now, evidently, you do," murmured my friend. "But with me here we will solve it in two wiggles of a sheep's tail."

Dr. Coaty—who, it turned out, was also district police surgeon—telephoned the Inspector of police in the larger neighboring town, and then approached Choulot and me. "If you like, I can take you to the scene of the crime," he offered.

We assented eagerly, and were soon out on the still-deserted high street of Teccomeshire Fen and making our way to the small wood we had noticed earlier.

On the way the good doctor told us that he and some friends had discovered the crime while out walking, and that, as the body was still warm, the murder must have taken place only shortly before. His medical opinion was that about half an hour at most had elapsed since death.

Almost before we knew it we were gazing solemnly at the dark, still figure sprawled out before us. Evidently the victim had been interrupted in the act of painting, for his palette was lying near him on the ground, brushes were scattered about, and the open paint box was propped up as if the artist were still using it.

"That's what's left of Ted Hoby," said Dr. Coaty. "He came here off and on to paint, but he hardly knew anyone here, except the girl at the pub. I can't understand who would have killed him."

"Aha!" exclaimed Choulot. "But that gives us two suspects—the girl in love and her uncle-guardian. Who knows what motives we may find, *hein*?"

At that moment the Carlston police arrived in the person of their local Inspector. To my delight he too had heard of Choulot, so once again we could be right in with the police in a murder investigation. This chap proved to be a prim, fussy fellow, but only too grateful to have an expert on the scene. I only hoped my old friend wouldn't disappoint him, for he has sometimes seemed to me less than thorough in exploring physical clues.

Together we all studied the body of Ted Hoby. We noted that the bullet had cleanly penetrated the heart, that the body was sprawled on its back, as if, when the bullet struck, Hoby had fallen backward off the camp stool which was still

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standing. A search of the dead man's pockets revealed a few pound notes, some loose change, a handkerchief, and a penknife. The dry ground yielded no footprints, and a search of the area produced no further clues.

Choulot, I am sorry to say, paid little attention to all this; instead, he seemed absorbed in the artist's equipment. He pored over the paintbox, although it seemed to me that the box held nothing unusual —just the ordinary collection of paints, brushes, cups for oil and turpentine, bottles of these liquids, and a palette knife. Choulot also scrutinized the brushes scattered about, feeling and even sniffing them. He solemnly reported that they smelled faintly of turpentine! He touched the canvas and palette, and announced that these were partly dry and partly sticky.

"Which strikes you as significant?" I asked him.

"But of course!" he said. "It leaps to the eye—that the brushes are clean."

I was puzzled, for it seemed to me that the cleanliness of the brushes was hardly a clue. Even if Choulot were suggesting that Hoby had only just started to paint, I couldn't see how this knowledge advanced us.

The expression on the face of the Inspector indicated that he shared my opinion, but that he was too polite to say so. To me, however, he muttered, "Old boy getting on in years, what?"

Finally Choulot was satisfied with his examination of the painting paraphernalia, and the Inspector also felt we had learned all we could for the time being, so we returned to the pub. Here the Inspector took over a small private room for questioning.

Miss Pitt was first. With an admirably straightforward air, she told us about herself and Hoby—how they had fallen in love some time ago, but how his unreasonable jealousy had driven an ever-widening wedge between them.

"But, look you, mademoiselle," burst out Choulot, "if *you* were lying dead in the wood, or another handsome young man, the jealousy, it might explain much. As it is, it does not explain why the jealous man himself is the dead one."

For this she had no explanation. In answer to Choulot's inquiry as to whether she was now in love with someone else, she replied that this was not the case—that the village of Teccomeshire Fen did not abound with eligible suitors. However, in answering Choulot's question there had seemed to be just a shade of hesitation in her manner.

As to the events of the day, she told us that Hoby had motored up in the morning, booked a room, and gone out at once to paint. He had returned for luncheon, after which she had gone out—therefore, she hadn't seen him leave in the af-

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ternoon. However, we were able to reason that he had gone back to painting, and, since the brushes were clean and the paint almost dry, he had just commenced when his killer intervened.

"Dad" Thornell was next, but he could add little that we didn't already know. Choulot had only one question to ask him.

"Monsieur Thornell," he inquired, "what vehicles are there on the premises?"

"Only mine," replied the landlord, obviously puzzled. He looked out the window as if to make sure —at the courtyard and grounds, which, as he had said, were innocent of vehicles. He explained that there was a garage in the rear which could hold only one car, and that his car was now in it.

"That is all I needed to know," Choulot pronounced with a satisfied air. "I see Monsieur Rikell has arrived in the public room—no doubt to tell us our own car is ready. Let us join him."

The Inspector could not stifle a reproof at this point, and I did not blame him. "Monsoor Choulot," said he stiffly, "murder is serious business, and I for one have no time for gossiping at the bar."

"Ah, do you think Papa Choulot is not serious? But most assuredly I am. We go now to unmask the murderer. Come."

"Choulot!" I cried. "Do you really know who the killer is?"

"*Mais oui,*" he announced calmly. "But do you not know also? You have but to use order and method, like myself. Come, *mon ami,* employ the little gray cells."

With that he approached Rikell, and then turning to the Inspector he said, "Here is your man."

I was sure then that Choulot had indeed lost his grip. All of us, Rikell included, were dumfounded. "But yes," the little Belgian went on, not heeding our disbelief. "*Sacré,* is it not obvious? There are four glaring pointers.

"One: Monsieur Hoby motors up to the pub. Very well, where is his car? Not on the empty street, either here or by the woods, nor yet on the grounds. Elsewhere in the village? But he knows no one, except mademoiselle and the landlord. Where more likely than in the village garage?

"Two: the victim paints in the morning, cleans his brushes, and comes back for lunch. Where is the rag with which he wiped his brushes? Not on the scene of the crime. Then the murderer has taken it, probably to wipe paint off his hands.

"I think, you know, it is the murderer who sets the things up in the afternoon. Hoby takes his car to the local garage—he needs repairs, or he wants to speak to Rikell about Mademoiselle Pitt. A quarrel ensues and Rikell kills him there. He takes the body back to the woods to avert suspicion, and sets up the paints for the same reason. I suspect

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that in the process he gets paint on himself and uses a rag conveniently lying among the paraphernalia to remove it. Then, being a mechanic to whom wiping himself off is automatic, he does the automatic thing—he tosses the rag in his truck —where we saw it!"

At that moment Rikell's face more than confirmed Choulot's statements. The reminder of the telltale rag in his truck completely undermined his defenses.

"I love Gerryl," he said dully. "I told that bloody swine so, and he went for me. He had a gun in his hand, but I got it away from him and shot him."

"The third point," continued Choulot when Rikell had been taken away, "was that the case needed a handsome young man to complete the picture. Love was dying between Mademoiselle Pitt and Monsieur Hoby, and whatever she says, she is bound, with her pretty face, to find consolation. And she was not convincing, decidedly not, when she said there was no one."

"I'll know better than to try to deceive you another time, Monsieur Choulot." laughed Gerryl. "I was afraid to mention it, and our friendship is so new I was sure the village hadn't learned about it. But that is only three points. What is the fourth, or is that to remain a mystery?"

"Aha!" twinkled Choulot. "That is no mystery. His name, mademoiselle—his name told me at the very beginning that Rikell was a killer."

EDITORS' NOTE: Well, Mrs. Norma Schier (to use her real name) has (who)dunit again! You will recall that in the August 1965 issue of EQMM we published a "first story" titled *If Hangman Treads,* as by Norma Haigs. This story was a bamboozle—a 'tec trap and a 'tec trick. The title, author's name, and every proper name in the story itself were anagrams—the whole kit-and-caboodle a pastiche of Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn stories.

Well, as you no doubt guessed, *The Teccomeshire Fen Mystery* is an anagrammatic pastiche-parody of our old and good friend, Hercule Poirot. And again the anagrams are multitudinous.

Of course Choulot knew the identity of the killer from the beginning——"Rikell" and "killer" are anagrams. There is another tipoff at the beginning: in the first sentence of the story we are told that Teccomeshire Fen was "later to

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become the scene of the crime." And no wonder!—"Teccomeshire Fen" and "scene of the crime" are anagrams.

Others? How many did you spot?

Pierre Choulot=Hercule Poirot
Stangish=Hastings
Carstone J. Pipp=Inspector Japp
Bugle Dolphins=old English pub
Ted Hoby=the body
Dad Thornell=the landlord
Gerryl Pitt=pretty girl
Dr. Gillian Coaty=local dignitary
Carlston police=local Inspector

As the author herself informed us, "By now it is abundantly obvious that the one and only Agatha Christie, grande dame of mystery fiction, is the spirit behind this nonsense," which (again quoting the author) is Mrs. Schier's "sincere tribute to Agatha Christie and a token of my admiration."

But, as Mrs. Schier concluded (and who says that women do not have the first and last word?), "Take another look at the name of the author of *The Teccomeshire Fen Mystery.*"

Cathie Haig Star=Agatha Christie

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

(Continued from page 66)

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Radin, Edward D. (Editor)	MASTERS OF MAYHEM: THE 1965 MWA ANTHOLOGY	Wm. Morrow & Co.	$3.95	10/8
Ransome, Stephen	THE SIN FILE	Dodd, Mead & Co.	$3.50	9/27
Roffman, Jan	A PENNY FOR THE GUY	Doubleday & Co.	$3.50	10/15
Spillane, Mickey	THE DEATH DEALERS	E. P. Dutton & Co.	$3.50	9/24
Stern, Richard Martin	I HIDE, WE SEEK	Chas. Scribner's Sons	$3.95	9/22
Stout, Rex	THE DOORBELL RANG	Viking Press	$3.50	10/8
Upfield, Arthur	THE DEVIL'S STEPS	British Book Centre	$4.50	10/15

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

Aarons, Edward S.	ASSIGNMENT—THE CAIRO DANCERS	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .50	9/30
Eberhart, Mignon C.	FIVE PASSENGERS FROM LISBON	Popular Library	$ .50	10/19
Gardner, John	THE LIQUIDATOR	Cres	$ .50	10/12
MacDonald, John D.	APRIL EVIL	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .50	9/30
Siller, Van	THE WIDOWER	Popular Library	$ .50	10/5

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***Poirot Indulges a Whim***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Hercule Poirot
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	A generation ago
COMMENTS:	*Actually, it was Captain Hastings who stumbled on the case—but Hastings did not consider it important. Poirot, on the other hand, was deeply intrigued . . .*

SO FAR, IN THE CASES WHICH I HAVE recorded, Hercule Poirot's investigations have started from the central fact, whether murder or robbery, and have proceeded by a process of logical deduction to the final triumphant unraveling. In the events I am now about to chronicle, a remarkable chain of circumstances led from the apparently trivial incidents which first attracted Poirot's attention to the sinister happenings which completed a most unusual case.

I had been spending the evening with an old friend of mine, Gerald Parker. There had been, perhaps, about half a dozen people there beside my host and myself, and the talk fell, as it was bound to sooner or later wherever Parker found himself, on the subject of house hunting in London.

Houses and flats were Parker's special hobby. Since the end of the War he had occupied at least half a dozen different flats and maisonnettes. No sooner was he settled anywhere than he would light unexpectedly on a new find, and would forthwith depart bag and baggage. His moves were nearly always accomplished at a slight pecuniary gain, for he had a shrewd

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business head, but it was sheer love of the sport that actuated him, and not a desire to make money at it.

We listened to Parker for some time with the respect of the novice for the expert. Then it was our turn, and a perfect babel of tongues was let loose. Finally the floor was left to Mrs. Robinson, a charming little bride who was there with her husband. I had never met them before, as Robinson was only a recent acquaintance of Parker's.

"Talking of flats," she said, "have you heard of our piece of luck, Mr. Parker? We've got a flat—at last! In Montagu Mansions."

"Well," said Parker, "I've always said there are plenty of flats—at a price."

"Yes, but this isn't at a price. It's dirt cheap. Only eighty pounds a year!"

"But—but Montagu Mansions is just off Knightsbridge, isn't it? Big handsome building. Or are you talking of a poor relation of the same name stuck in the slums somewhere?"

"No, it's the Knightsbridge one. That's what makes it so wonderful."

"Wonderful is the word! It's a blinking miracle. But there must be a catch somewhere. Big premium, I suppose?"

"No premium—none at all."

"No prem—oh, hold my head, somebody," groaned Parker.

"But we've got to buy the furniture," continued Mrs. Robinson.

"Ah!" Parker brisked up. "I knew there was a catch."

"For only fifty pounds. And it's beautifully furnished."

"I give up," said Parker. "The present occupants must be lunatics with a taste for philanthropy."

Mrs. Robinson was looking a little troubled. A little pucker appeared between her dainty brows.

"It *is* queer, isn't it? You don't think that—that—the place is *haunted?*"

"Never heard of a haunted flat," declared Parker decisively.

"N-no." Mrs. Robinson appeared far from convinced. "But there were several things about it all that struck me as—well, queer."

"For instance—" I suggested.

"Ah," said Parker, "our criminal expert's attention is aroused. Unburden yourself to him, Mrs. Robinson. Hastings is a great unraveler of mysteries."

I laughed, embarrassed but not wholly displeased with the role thrust upon me.

"Oh, not really queer, Captain Hastings, but when we went to the agents, Stosser and Paul—we hadn't tried them before because they only have the expensive Mayfair flats, but we thought at any rate it would do no harm—everything they offered us was four and five hundred a year, or else with huge premiums, and then, just as we were going, they mentioned that they had a flat at eighty, but that they doubted if it would be any good our going

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there, because it had been on their books some time and they had sent so many people to see it that it was almost sure to be taken—'snapped up' as the clerk put it—only people were so tiresome in not letting them know, and then they went on sending, and people get annoyed at being sent to a place that had, perhaps, been let for some time."

Mrs. Robinson paused for some much needed breath, and then continued. "We thanked him, and said that we quite understood it would probably be no good, but that we should like an order all the same—just in case. And we went there straightaway in a taxi, for, after all, you never know. Number four was on the second floor, and just as we were waiting for the lift, Elsie Ferguson—she's a friend of mine, Captain Hastings, and they are looking for a flat too—came hurrying down the stairs. 'Ahead of you for once, my dear,' she said. 'But it's no good. It's already let.'

"That seemed to finish it, but—well, as John said, the place was very cheap, we could afford to give more, and perhaps if we offered a premium— A horrid thing to do, of course, and I feel quite ashamed of telling you, but you know what flat hunting is."

I assured her that I was well aware that in the struggle for house-room the baser side of human nature frequently triumphed over the higher, and that the well-known rule of dog eat dog always applied.

"So we went up and, would you believe it, the flat wasn't let at all. We were shown over it by the maid, and then we saw the mistress, and the thing was settled then and there. Immediate possession and fifty pounds for the furniture. We signed the agreement next day, and we are to move in tomorrow." Mrs. Robinson paused triumphantly.

"And what about Mrs. Ferguson?" asked Parker. Let's have your deductions, Hastings."

"'Obvious, my dear Watson,'" I quoted lightly. "She went to the wrong flat."

"Oh, Captain Hastings, how clever of you!" cried Mrs. Robinson admiringly.

I rather wished Poirot had been there. Sometimes I have the feeling that he rather underestimates my capabilities.

The whole thing was rather amusing, and I propounded the thing as a mock problem to Poirot on the following morning. He seemed interested, and questioned me rather narrowly as to the rents of flats in various localities.

"A curious story," he said thoughtfully. "Excuse me, Hastings, I must take a short stroll."

When he returned, about an hour later, his eyes were gleaming with a peculiar excitement. He laid his stick on the table and brushed the nap of his hat with his usual tender care.

"It is as well, *mon ami*, that we have no affairs of moment on hand.

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We can devote ourselves wholly to the present investigation."

"What investigation are you talking about?"

"The remarkable cheapness of your friend's, Mrs. Robinson's, new flat."

"Poirot, you are not serious!"

"I am most serious. Figure to yourself, my friend, that the real rent of those flats is £350. I have just ascertained that from the landlord's agents. And yet this particular flat is being sublet at eighty pounds. Why?"

"There must be something wrong with it. Perhaps it is haunted, as Mrs. Robinson suggested."

Poirot shook his head in a dissatisfied manner. "Then again how curious it is that her friend tells her the flat is let, and, when she goes up, behold, it is not so at all!"

"But surely you agree with me that the other woman must have gone to the wrong flat. That is the only possible solution."

"You may or may not be right on that point, Hastings. The fact still remains that numerous other applicants were sent to see it, and yet, in spite of its remarkable cheapness, it was still on the market when Mrs. Robinson arrived."

"That shows that there *must* be something wrong about it."

"Mrs. Robinson did not seem to notice anything amiss. Very curious, is it not? Did she impress you as being a truthful woman, Hastings?"

"She was a delightful creature."

"*Evidemment!* since she renders you incapable of replying to my question. Describe her to me, then."

"Well, she's tall and fair; her hair's really a beautiful shade of auburn—"

"Always you have had a penchant for auburn hair!" murmured Poirot. "But continue."

"Blue eyes and a very nice complexion and—well, that's all, I think," I concluded lamely.

"And her husband?"

"Oh, he's quite a nice fellow—nothing startling."

"Dark or fair?"

"I don't know—betwixt and between and just an ordinary sort of face."

Poirot nodded. "Yes, there are hundreds of these average men—and, anyway, you bring more sympathy and appreciation to your description of women. Do you know anything about these people? Does Parker know them well?"

"They are just recent acquaintances, I believe. But surely, Poirot, you don't think for an instant—"

Poirot raised his hand. "*Tout doucement, mon ami.* Have I said that I think anything? All I say is—it is a curious story. And there is nothing to throw light upon it; except perhaps the lady's name, eh, Hastings?"

"Her name is Stella," I said stiffly, "but I don't see—"

Poirot interrupted me with a tremendous chuckle. Something seem-

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ed to be amusing him vastly.

"And Stella means a star, does it not?"

"What on earth—"

"And stars give light! *Voilà!* Calm yourself, Hastings. Do not put on that air of injured dignity. Come, we will go to Montagu Mansions and make a few inquiries."

The Montagu Mansions were a handsome block of buildings in excellent repair. A uniformed porter was sunning himself on the threshold, and it was to him that Poirot addressed himself. "Pardon, but could you tell me if a Mr. and Mrs. Robinson reside here?"

The porter was a man of few words and apparently of a sour or suspicious disposition. He hardly looked at us and grunted, "Number Four. Second floor."

"Thank you. Can you tell me how long they have been here?"

"Six months."

I started forward in amazement, conscious as I did so of Poirot's malicious grin.

"Impossible," I cried. "You must be making a mistake."

"Six months."

"Are you sure? The lady I mean is tall and fair with reddish gold hair and—"

"That's 'er," said the porter. "Come in the Michaelmas quarter, they did. Just six months ago."

He appeared to lose interest in us and retreated slowly up the hall. I followed Poirot outside.

"*Eh bien,* Hastings?" my friend demanded slyly. "Are you so sure that delightful women always speak the truth?"

I did not reply.

Poirot had steered his way into Brompton Road before I asked him what he was going to do and where we were going.

"To the house agents, Hastings. I have a great desire to get a flat in Montagu Mansions. If I am not mistaken, several interesting things will take place there before long."

We were fortunate in our quest. Number 8, on the fourth floor, was to be let furnished at ten guineas a week. Poirot promptly took it for a month.

Outside in the street again, he silenced my protests. "But I make money nowadays! Why should I not indulge a whim? By the way, Hastings, have you a revolver?"

"Yes—somewhere," I answered, slightly thrilled. "Do you think—"

"That you will need it? It is quite possible. The idea pleases you, I see. Always the spectacular and romantic appeal to you."

The following day saw us installed in our temporary home. The flat was pleasantly furnished. It occupied the same position in the building as that of the Robinsons, but was two floors higher.

The day after our installation was a Sunday. In the afternoon Poirot left the front door ajar, and summoned me hastily as a bang reverberated from somewhere below.

"Look over the banisters. Are

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those your friends? Do not let them see you."

I craned my neck over the staircase.

"That's them," I declared in an ungrammatical whisper.

"Good. Wait a while."

About half an hour later, a young woman emerged in brilliant and varied clothing. With a sigh of satisfaction, Poirot tiptoed back into the flat.

"*C'est ça.* After the master and mistress, the maid. The flat should now be empty."

"What are we going to do?" I asked uneasily.

Poirot had trotted briskly into the scullery and was hauling at the rope of the coal lift.

"We are about to descend after the method of the dustbins," he explained cheerfully. "No one will observe us. The Sunday concert, the Sunday 'afternoon out,' and finally the Sunday nap after the Sunday dinner of England—*le rosbif*—all these will distract attention from the doings of Hercule Poirot. Come, my friend."

He stepped into the rough wooden contrivance and I followed him gingerly.

"Are we going to break into the flat?" I asked dubiously.

Poirot's answer was not too reassuring. "Not precisely today," he replied.

Pulling on the rope, we descended slowly till we reached the second floor. Poirot uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he perceived that the wooden door into the scullery was open.

"You observe? Never do they bolt these doors in the daytime. And yet anyone could mount or descend as we have done. At night, yes—though not always then—and it is against that that we are going to make provision."

He had drawn some tools from his pocket as he spoke and set deftly to work, his object being to arrange the bolt so that it could be pulled back from the lift. The operation occupied about three minutes. Then Poirot returned the tools to his pocket, and we ascended to our own domain.

On Monday, Poirot was out all day, but when he returned in the evening he flung himself into his chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Hastings, shall I recount to you a little history? A story after your own heart and which will remind you of your favorite cinema?"

"Go ahead," I laughed. "I presume that it is a true story, not one of your efforts of fancy."

"It is true enough. Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard will vouch for its accuracy, since it was through his kind offices that it came to my ears. Listen, Hastings. A little over six months ago some important Naval plans were stolen from an American Government department. They showed the position of some of the most important Harbor defenses, and would be worth a considerable

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sum to certain foreign Governments.

"Suspicion fell upon a young man named Luigi Valdarno, an Italian by birth, who was employed in a minor capacity in the Department and who was missing at the same time as the papers. Whether Luigi Valdarno was the thief or not, he was found two days later on the East Side in New York, shot dead. The papers were not on him.

"Now for some time past, Luigi Valdarno had been going about with a Miss Elsa Hardt, a young concert singer who had recently appeared and who lived with a brother in an apartment in Washington. Nothing was known of the antecedents of Miss Elsa Hardt, and she disappeared suddenly about the time of Valdarno's death. There are reasons for believing that she was in reality an accomplished international spy who has done much nefarious work under various aliases.

"The American Secret Service, while doing their best to trace her, also kept an eye on certain insignificant aliens living in Washington. They felt pretty certain that, when Elsa Hardt had covered her tracks sufficiently, she would approach the gentlemen in question. One of them left suddenly for England a fortnight ago. On the face of it, therefore, it would seem that Elsa Hardt is in England."

Poirot paused, and then added softly, "The official description of Elsa Hardt is: height five foot seven, eyes blue, hair auburn, fair complexion, nose straight."

"Mrs. Robinson!" I gasped.

"Well, there is a chance of it, anyhow," amended Poirot. "Also, I learn that a swarthy man, a foreigner of some kind, was inquiring about the occupants of Number Four only this morning. Therefore, *mon ami,* I fear that you must forswear your beauty sleep tonight, and join me in my all-night vigil in the flat below—armed with that excellent revolver of yours, *bien entendu!*"

"Rather," I cried with enthusiasm. "When shall we start?"

"The hour of midnight is both solemn and suitable, I fancy. Nothing is likely to occur before then."

At twelve o'clock precisely, we crept cautiously into the coal lift and lowered ourselves to the second floor. Under Poirot's manipulation, the wooden door quickly swung inward, and we climbed into the flat. From the scullery we passed into the kitchen where we established ourselves comfortably in two chairs with the door into the hall ajar.

"Now we have but to wait," said Poirot contentedly, closing his eyes.

To me the waiting appeared endless. I was terrified of going to sleep. Just when it seemed to me that I had been there about eight hours—and had, as I found out afterward, in reality been exactly one hour and twenty minutes—a faint scratching sound came to my ears.

Poirot's hand touched mine. I

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rose, and together we moved carefully in the direction of the hall. The noise came from there. Poirot placed his lips to my ear.

"Outside the front door. They are cutting out the lock. When I give the word, not before, fall upon him from behind and hold him fast. Be careful, he will have a knife."

Presently there was a rending sound, and a little circle of light appeared through the door. It was extinguished immediately and then the door was slowly opened.

Poirot and I flattened ourselves against the wall. I heard a man's breathing as he passed us. Then he flashed on his torch, and as he did so, Poirot whispered, *"Allez."*

We sprang together. With a quick movement Poirot enveloped the intruder's head with a light woolen scarf while I pinioned his arms. The whole affair was quick and noiseless. I twisted a dagger from his hand, and as Poirot brought down the scarf from his eyes, while keeping it wound tightly round his mouth, I jerked up my revolver where he could see it and understand resistance was useless.

As the man ceased to struggle, Poirot put his mouth close to his ear and began to whisper rapidly. After a minute the man nodded. Then ordering silence with a movement of the hand, Poirot led the way out of the flat and down the stairs. Our captive followed, and I brought up the rear with the revolver.

When we were out in the street, Poirot turned to me. "There is a taxi waiting just round the corner. Give me the revolver. We shall not need it now."

"But if this fellow tries to escape?"

Poirot smiled. "He will not."

I returned in a minute with the waiting taxi. The scarf had been unwound from the stranger's face, and I gave a start of surprise. "Why, he's an Italian."

We got into the taxi, and Poirot gave the driver an address in St. John's Wood. I was by now completely fogged. I did not like to ask Poirot in front of our captive where we were going, and strove in vain to obtain some light on the proceedings.

We alighted at the door of a small house standing back from the road. A returning wayfarer, slightly drunk, was lurching along the pavement and almost collided with Poirot, who said something sharply to him which I did not catch.

Then all three of us went up the steps of the house. Poirot rang the bell and motioned us to stand a little aside. There was no answer, so he seized the knocker which he plied vigorously.

A light appeared suddenly above the fanlight, and the door was opened cautiously a little way.

"What the devil do you want?" a man's voice demanded harshly.

"I want the doctor. My wife is taken ill."

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"There's no doctor here."

The man was about to shut the door, but Poirot thrust his foot in adroitly. He became suddenly a perfect caricature of an infuriated Frenchman.

"What you say, there is no doctor? I will have the law on you. You must come! I will stay here and ring and knock all night."

"My dear sir—" The door was opened again, and the man, clad in a dressing gown and slippers, stepped forward to pacify Poirot with an uneasy glance round.

"I will call the police." And Poirot prepared to descend the steps.

"No, don't do that for heaven's sake!" The man dashed after him.

With a neat push Poirot sent him staggering down the steps. In another minute all three of us were inside the door and it was pushed to and bolted.

"Quick—in here." Poirot led the way into the nearest room, switching on the light as he did so. "And you—behind the curtain."

"Si, signor," said the Italian, and slid rapidly behind the full folds of rose-colored velvet which draped the window.

It was not a minute too soon. Just as he disappeared from view a woman rushed into the room. She was tall with reddish hair and held a scarlet kimono round her slender form.

"Where is my husband?" she cried, with a quick frightened glance. "Who are you?"

Poirot stepped forward with a bow.

"It is to be hoped your husband will not suffer from a chill. I observed that he had slippers on his feet, and that his dressing gown was a warm one."

"Who are you? What are you doing in my house?"

"It is true that none of us has the pleasure of your acquaintance, madame. It is especially to be regretted as one of our number has come specially from New York in order to meet you."

The curtains parted and the Italian stepped out. To my horror I observed that he was brandishing my revolver, which Poirot doubtless must have put down through inadvertence in the cab.

The woman gave a piercing scream and turned to fly, but Poirot was standing in front of the closed door.

"Let me by," she shrieked. "He will murder me!"

"Who was it that croaked Luigi Valdarno?" asked the Italian hoarsely, brandishing the weapon and sweeping each one of us with it. We dared not move.

"My God, Poirot, this is awful! What shall we do? I cried.

"You will oblige me by refraining from talking so much, Hastings. I can assure you that our friend will not shoot until I give the word."

"You are sure of that, eh?" said the Italian, leering unpleasantly.

It was more than I was, but the

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woman turned to Poirot like a flash.

"What is it you want?"

Poirot bowed. "I do not think it is necessary to insult Miss Elsa Hardt's intelligence by telling her."

With a swift movement the woman snatched up a big black velvet cat which served as a cover for the telephone.

"They are stitched in the lining of that."

"Clever," murmured Poirot appreciatively. He stood aside from the door. "Good evening, madame. I will detain your friend from New York while you make your getaway."

"What a fool!" roared the big Italian, and raising the revolver he fired point-blank at the woman's retreating figure just as I flung myself upon him.

But the weapon merely clicked harmlessly and Poirot's voice rose in mild reproof.

"Never will you trust your old friend, Hastings. I do not care for my friends to carry loaded pistols about with them and never would I permit a mere acquaintance to do so. No, no, *mon ami.*" This to the Italian who was swearing hoarsely.

Poirot continued to address him in a tone of mild reproof. "See now, what I have done for you. I have saved you from being hanged. And do not think that our beautiful lady will escape. No, no, the house is watched, back and front. Straight into the arms of the police they will go. Is not that a beautiful and consoling thought? Yes, you may leave the room now. But be careful—be very careful. I— Ah, he is gone! And my friend Hastings looks at me with eyes of reproach.

"But it was all so simple! It was clear from the first that out of several hundred applicants for Number Four, Montagu Mansions only the Robinsons were considered suitable. Why? What was there that singled them out from the rest—at practically a glance? Their appearance? Possibly, but it was not so unusual. Their name, then!"

"But there's nothing unusual about the name of Robinson," I cried. "It's quite a common name."

"Ah! *Sapristi,* but exactly! That was the point. Elsa Hardt and her husband, or brother or whatever he really is, come from New York, and take a flat in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Suddenly they learn that one of these secret societies, the Mafia or the Camorra, to which doubtless Luigi Valdarno belonged, is on their track. What do they do?

"They hit on a scheme of transparent simplicity. Evidently they knew that their pursuers were not personally acquainted with either of them. What then can be simpler? They offer the flat at an absurdly low rental. Of the thousands of young couples in London looking for flats, there cannot fail to be several Robinsons. It is only a matter of waiting. If you will look at the name of Robinson in the telephone

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directory, you will realize that a fair-haired Mrs. Robinson was pretty sure to come along sooner or later.

"Then what will happen? The avenger from New York arrives. He strikes! All is over, vengeance is satisfied, and Miss Elsa Hardt has escaped by the skin of her teeth once more.

"By the way, Hastings, you must present me to the real Mrs. Robinson—that delightful and truthful creature! What will they think when they find their flat has been broken into? We must hurry back. Ah, that sounds like Inspector Japp and his friends arriving."

A mighty tattoo sounded on the knocker.

"How did you know this address?" I asked as I followed Poirot out into the hall. "Oh, of course, you had the first Mrs. Robinson followed when she left the other flat."

"*A la bonne heure,* Hastings. You use your gray cells at last. Now for a little surprise for Japp."

Softly unbolting the door, he stuck the cat's head round the edge and ejaculated a piercing "Miaow."

The Scotland Yard Inspector, who was standing outside with another man, jumped in spite of himself.

"Oh, it's only Monsieur Poirot and one of his little jokes!" he exclaimed, as Poirot's head followed that of the cat. "Let us in, moosior."

"You have our friends safe and sound?"

"Yes, we've got the birds all right. But they didn't have the goods with them."

"I see. So you come to search. Well, I am about to depart with Hastings, but I should like to give you a little lecture on the history and habits of the domestic cat."

"For the Lord's sake, have you gone completely balmy?"

"The cat," declaimed Poirot, "was worshiped by the ancient Egyptians. It is still regarded by some as a symbol of good luck if a black cat crosses your path. This cat crossed your path tonight, Japp. To speak of the interior of any animal or any person is not, I know, considered polite in England. But the interior of this cat is perfectly delicate. I refer to the lining."

With a sudden grunt the man with Japp seized the cat from Poirot's hand.

"Oh, I forgot to introduce you," said Japp. "Mr. Poirot, this is Mr. Burt of the United States Secret Service."

The American's trained fingers had felt what he was looking for. He held out his hand, and for a moment speech failed him. Then he rose to the occasion.

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Burt.

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CALENDAR OF CRIME

The October tale in the CALENDAR OF CRIME . . . *How Ellery and Nikki attended a Halloween party complete with Black Cat costumes, masks, pumpkins, skeletons, witches, darkness, excitement, confusion —and a murder game to top the evening's feline festivities . . .*

THE HALLOWEEN MYSTERY

by ELLERY QUEEN

THE SQUARE-CUT ENVELOPE WAS A creation of orange ink on black notepaper; by which Ellery instantly divined its horrid authorship. Behind it leered a bouncy hostess, all teeth and enthusiastic ideas, who spent large sums of some embarrassed man's money to build a better mousetrap.

Having too often been one of the mice, he was grateful that the envelope was addressed to *Miss Nikki Porter.*

"But why to me at your apartment?" wondered Nikki, turning the black envelope over and finding nothing.

"Studied insult," Ellery assured her. "One of those acid-sweet women who destroy an honest girl's reputation at a stroke. Don't even open it. Hurl it into the fire, and let's get on with the work."

So Nikki opened it and drew out an enclosure cut in the shape of a cat.

"I am a master of metaphor," muttered Ellery.

"What?" said Nikki, unfolding the feline.

"It doesn't matter. But if you insist on playing the mouse, go ahead and read it." The truth was, he was a little curious himself.

"Fellow Spook," began Nikki, frowning.

"Read no more. The hideous details are already clear—"

"Oh, shut up," said Nikki. *"There is a secret meeting of The Charmed Circle of Black Cats in Suite 1313, Hotel Chancellor, New York City, Oct. 31."*

"Of course," said Ellery glumly. "That follows logically."

"You must come in full costume as a Black Cat, including domino mask. Time your arrival for 9:05 p.m. promptly. Till the Witching Hour. Signed—*G. Host.* How darling!"

"No clue to the criminal?"

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"No. I don't recognize the handwriting . . ."

"Of course you're not going."

"Of course I *am!*"

"Having performed my moral duty as friend, protector, and employer, I now suggest you put the foul thing away and get back to our typewriter."

"What's more," said Nikki, "you're going, too."

Ellery smiled his Number Three smile—the toothy one. "Am I?"

"There's a postscript on the cat's —on the reverse side. *Be sure to drag your boss-cat along, also costumed.*"

Ellery could see himself as a sort of overgrown Puss-in-Boots plying the sjambok over a houseful of bounding tabbies all swilling Scotch. The vision was tiring.

"I decline with the usual thanks."

"You're a stuffed shirt."

"I'm an intelligent man."

"You don't know how to have fun."

"These brawls inevitably wind up with someone's husband taking a poke at a tall, dark, handsome stranger."

"Coward."

"Heavens, I wasn't referring to myself—!"

Whence it is obvious he had already lost the engagement.

Ellery stood before a door on the thirteenth floor of the Hotel Chancellor, cursing the Druids.

For it was Saman at whose mossy feet must be laid the origins of our recurrent October silliness. True, the lighting of ceremonial bonfires in a Gaelic glade must have seemed natural and proper at the time, and a Gaelic grove fitting rendezvous for an annual convention of ghosts and witches; but the responsibility of even pagan deities must surely be held to extend beyond temporal bounds, and the Druid lord of death should have foreseen that a bonfire would be out of place in a Manhattan hotel suite, not to mention disembodied souls, however wicked.

Then Ellery recalled that Pomona, goddess of fruits, had contributed nuts and apples to the burgeoning Halloween legend, and he cursed the Romans, too.

There had been Inspector Queen at home, who had intolerably chosen to ignore the whole thing; the taxi driver, who had asked amiably: "Fraternity initiation?"; the dread chorus of miaows during the long, long trek across the Chancellor lobby; and, finally, the reeking wag in the elevator who had tried to swing Ellery around by his tail, puss-pussying obscenely as he did so.

Cried Ellery out of the agony of his mortification: "Never, never, *never* again will I—"

"Stop grousing and look at this," said Nikki, peering through her domino mask.

"What is it? I can't see through this damned thing."

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"A sign on the door. *If You Are a Black Cat, Walk in!!!!!* With five exclamation points."

"All right, all right. Let's go in and get it over with."

And, of course, when they opened the unlocked door of 1313, Darkness.

And Silence.

"Now what do we do?" giggled Nikki, and jumped at the snick of the door behind them.

"I'll tell you now what," said Ellery enthusiastically. "Let's get the hell out of here."

But Nikki was already a yard away, black in blackness.

"Wait! Give me your hand, Nikki."

"*Mister* Queen. That's not my hand."

"Beg your pardon," muttered Ellery. "We seem to be trapped in a hallway . . ."

"There's a red light down there! Must be at the end of the hall—*eee!*"

"Think of the soup this would make for the starving." Ellery disentangled her from the embrace of some articulated bones.

"Ellery! I don't think that's funny at all."

"I don't think *any* of this is funny."

They groped toward the red light. It was not so much a light as a rosy shade of darkness which faintly blushed above a small plinth of the raven variety. "The woman's cornered the Black Paper Market," Ellery thought disagreeably as he read the runes of yellow fire on the plinth: TURN LEFT!!!!!!!

"And into, I take it," he growled, "the great unknown." And, indeed, having explored to the left, his hand encountered outer space; whereupon, intrepidly, and with a large yearning to master the mystery and come to grips with its diabolical authoress, Ellery plunged through the invisible archway, Nikki bravely clinging to his tail.

"Ouch!"

"What's the matter?" gasped Nikki.

"Bumped into a chair. Skinned my shin. What would a chair be doing—?"

"Pooooor Ellery," said Nikki, laughing. "Did the dreat bid mad hurt his *—Ow!*"

"Blast this—Ooo!"

"Ellery, where are you? Ouch!"

"Ow, my foot," bellowed Ellery from somewhere. "What is this—a tank trap? Floor cluttered with pillows, hassocks—"

"Something cold and wet over here. Feels like an ice bucket . . . Owwwww!" There was a wild clatter of metal, a soggy crash, and silence again.

"Nikki! What happened?"

"I fell over a rack of fire tongs, I think," Nikki's voice came clearly from floor level. "Yes. Fire tongs."

"Of all the stupid, childish, unfunny—"

"Oop."

"Lost in a madhouse. Why is the

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furniture scattered every which way?"

"How should I know? Ellery, where *are* you?"

"In Bedlam. Keep your head now, Nikki, and stay where you are. Sooner or later a St. Bernard will find you and bring—"

Nikki screamed.

"Thank God," said Ellery, shutting his eyes.

The room was full of blessed Consolidated Edison light, and various adult figures in black-cat costumes and masks were leaping and laughing and shouting: "Surpriiiiiise!" like idiot phantoms at the crisis of a delirium.

O Halloween.

"Ann! Ann Trent!" Nikki was squealing. "Oh, Ann, you fool, how ever did you find me?"

"Nikki, you're looking wonderful. Oh, but you're famous, darling. The great E. Q.'s secretary . . ."

Nuts to you, sister. Even bouncier than predicted. With that lazy, hippy strut. And chic, glossy chic. Lugs her sex around like a sample case. Kind of female who would be baffled by an egg. Looks five years older than she is, Antoine notwithstanding.

"But it's not Trent any more, Nikki—it's Mrs. John Crombie. Johnnnny!"

"Ann, you're *married?* And didn't invite me to the wedding!"

"Spliced in dear old Lunnon. John's British—or was. Johnny, stop flirting with Edith Baxter and come here!"

"Ann darlin'—this exquisite girl! Scotch or bourbon, Nikki? Scotch if you're the careful type—but bourbon works faster."

John Crombie, Gent. Eyes of artificial blue, slimy smile, sunlamp complexion, Olivier chin. British Club and Fox and Hounds—he posts even in a living room. He will say in a moment that he loathes Americah. Exactly. Ann Trent Crombie must have large amounts of the filthy. He despises her and patronizes her friends. He will fix me with the superior Mayfair smile and flap a limp brown hand . . . *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

"I warn you, Nikki," Ann Crombie was saying, "I'm hitched to a man who tries to jockey every new female he meets." Blush hard, prim Nikki. Friends grow in unforeseen directions. "Oh, Lucy! Nikki, do you remember my kid sister Lu—?"

Squeal, squeal. "Lucy Trent! This isn't *you?*"

"Am I grown up, Nikki?"

"Heavens!"

"Lucy's done *all* the party decorating, darling—spent the whole sordid day up here alone fixing things up. Hasn't she done an *inspired* job? But then I'm so useless."

"Ann means she wouldn't help, Nikki. Just a lout."

Uncertain laugh. Poor Lucy. Embarrassed by her flowering

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youth, trying hard to be New York . . . There she goes refilling a glass—emptying an ashtray—running out to the kitchen—for a tray of fresh hot pigs-in-blankets?—bong! . . . the unwanted and gauche hiding confusion by making herself useful. Keep away from your brother-in-law, dear; that's an upstanding little bosom under the Black Cat's hide.

"Oh, Ellery, do come here and meet the Baxters. Mrs. Baxter—Edith—Ellery Queen . . ."

What's this? A worm who's turned, surely! The faded-fair type, hard-used by wedlock. Very small, a bit on the spready side—she'd let herself go—but now she's back in harness again, all curried and combed, with a triumphant lift to her pale head, like an old thoroughbred proudly prancing in a paddock she had never hoped to enter again. And that glitter of secret pleasure in her blinky brown eyes, almost malice, whenever she looked at Ann Crombie . . .

"Jerry Baxter, Edith's husband. Ellery Queen."

"Hiya, son!"

"Hi yourself, Jerry."

Salesman, or advertising-agency man, or Broadway agent. The life of the party. Three drinks and he's off to the races. He will be the first to fall in the apple tub, the first to pin the tail on Lucy or Nikki instead of on the donkey, the first to be sick and the first to pass out. Skitter, stagger, sweat, and whoop. Why do you whoop, Jerry Baxter?

Ellery shook hot palms, smiled with what he hoped was charm, said affably, "Yes, isn't it?" "Haven't we met somewhere?" and things like that, wondering what he was doing in a hotel living-room festooned with apples, marshmallows, nuts, and criss-crossing crepe-paper twists, hung with grinning pumpkins and fancy black-and-orange cardboard cats, skeletons, and witches, and choked with bourbon fumes, tobacco smoke, and Chanel No. 5.

The noise was maddening, and merely to cross the room required the preparations of an expedition, for the overturned furniture and other impedimenta on the floor—cunningly plotted to trap the groping Black Cats on their arrival—had been left where they were.

So Ellery, highball in hand, wedged himself in a safe corner and mentally added Nikki to the Druids and the Romans.

Ellery accepted the murder game without a murmur. He knew the futility of protest. Wherever he went, people at once suggested a murder game, apparently on the theory that a busman enjoys nothing so much as a bus. And, of course, he was to be the detective.

"Well, well, let's get started," he said gaily, for all the traditional Halloween games had been played, Nikki had slapped Jerry Baxter laughingly once and British John-

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ny—not laughingly—twice, the house detective had made a courtesy call, and it was obvious the delightful evening had all but run its course.

He hoped Nikki would have sense enough to cut the *pièce de résistance* short, so that a man might go home and give his thanks to God; but no, there she was in a whispery, giggly huddle with Ann Crombie and Lucy Trent, while John Crombie rested his limp hand on her shoulder and Edith Baxter splashed some angry bourbon into her glass.

Jerry was on all fours, being a cat.

"In just a minute," called Nikki, and she tripped through the archway—kitchen-bound, to judge from certain subsequent cutlery sounds—leaving Crombie's hand momentarily suspended.

Edith Baxter said, "Jerry, get up off that floor and stop making a darned fool of yourself!"—furiously.

"Now we're all set," announced Nikki, reappearing. "Everybody around in a circle. First I'll deal out these cards, and whoever gets the ace of spades *don't let on!*—because you're the Murderer."

"Ooh!"

"Ann, you stop peeking."

"Who's peeking?"

"A tenner says I draw the fatal pasteboard," laughed Crombie. "I'm the killer type."

"*I'm* the killer type!" shouted Jerry Baxter. "Gack-gack-gack-gack!"

Ellery closed his eyes.

"Ellery! Wake up."

"Huh?"

Nikki was shaking him. The rest of the company were lined up on the far side of the room from the archway, facing the wall. For a panicky moment he thought of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

"You go on over there with the others, smartypants. You musn't see who the murderer is, either, so you close your eyes, too."

"Fits in perfectly with my plans," said Ellery, and he dutifully joined the five people at the wall.

"Spread out a little there—I don't want anyone touching anyone else. That's it. Eyes all shut? Good. Now I want the person who drew the ace of spades—Murderer—to step quietly away from the wall—"

"Not cricket," came John Crombie's annoying alto. "*You'll* see who it is, dear heart."

"Yes," said Edith Baxter nastily. "The light's on."

"But I'm running this assassination! Now stop talking, eyes closed. Step out, Murderer—that's it . . . quietly! No talking there at the wall! Mr. Queen is *very* bright and he'd get the answer in a shot just by eliminating voices—"

"Oh, come, Nikki," said Mr. Queen modestly.

"Now, Murderer, here's what you do. On the kitchen table you'll find a full-face mask, a flashlight,

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and a bread knife. Wait! Don't start for the kitchen yet—go when I switch off the light in here; that will be your signal to start. When you get to the kitchen, put on the mask, take the flashlight and knife, steal back into this room, and—pick a victim!"

"Oooh."

"Ahhhh!"

"Ee!"

Mr. Queen banged his forehead lightly against the wall. How long, O Lord?

"Now remember, Murderer," cried Nikki, "you pick anyone you want—except, of course, Ellery. He has to live long enough to solve the crime."

If you don't hurry, my love, I'll be dead of natural causes.

"It'll be dark, Murderer, except for your flash, so even I won't know what victim you pick—"

"May the detective inquire the exact purpose of the knife?" asked the detective wearily of the wall. "Its utility in this divertissement escapes me."

"Oh, the knife's just a prop, goopy—atmosphere. Murderer, you tap your victim on the shoulder. Victim, whoever feels the tap, turn around and let Murderer lead you out of the living room to the kitchen."

"The kitchen, I take it, is the scene of the crime," said Mr. Queen gloomily.

"Uh-huh. And Victim, as soon as Murderer gets you into the kitchen, scream like all fury as if you're being stabbed. Make it realistic! Everybody set? Ready? . . . All right, Murderer, soon's I turn this light off go to the kitchen, get the mask and stuff, come back, and pick your victim. Here goes!"

Click! went the light switch. Being a man who checked his facts, Ellery automatically cheated and opened one eye. Dark, as advertised. He shut the eye, and then jumped.

"Stop!" Nikki had shrieked.

"What, what?" asked Ellery excitedly.

"Oh, I'm not talking to you, Ellery. Murderer, I forgot something! Where are you? Oh, never mind. Remember, after you've supposedly stabbed your victim in the kitchen, come back to this room and quickly take your former place against the wall. Don't make a sound; don't touch anyone. I want the room to be as quiet as it is this minute. Use the flash to help you see your way back, but as soon as you reach the wall turn the flash off and throw flash and mask into the middle of the living room—thus, darling, getting rid of the evidence. Do you see? But, of course, you *can't*. Now even though it's dark, people, *keep your eyes shut*. All right, Murderer—get set—*go!*"

Ellery dozed . . .

It seemed a mere instant later that he heard Nikki's voice saying with incredible energy, "Murderer's tapping a victim—careful with that

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flashlight, Murderer!—we mustn't tempt our Detective *too* much. All right, Victim? Now let Murderer lead you to your doom . . . the rest of you keep your eyes closed . . . don't turn ar . . ."

Ellery dozed again . . .

He awoke with a start at a man's scream.

"Here! What—"

"Ellery Queen, you asleep again? That was Victim being carved up in the kitchen. Now . . . yes! . . . here's Murderer's flash back . . . that's it, to the wall quietly . . . now flash *off!*—fine!—toss it and your mask away . . . Boom. Tossed. Are you turned around, face to the wall, Murderer, like everybody else? Everybody ready? Lllllights!"

"Now—" began Ellery briskly.

"Why, it's John who's missing," laughed Lucy.

"Pooooor John is daid," sang Jerry.

"My poor husband," wailed Ann. "Jo-hon, come back to me!"

"Ho, John!" shouted Nikki.

"Just a moment," said Ellery. "Isn't Edith Baxter missing, too?"

"My wiff?" shouted Jerry. "Hey, wiff! Come outa the woodwork!"

"Oh, darn," said Lucy. "There mustn't be two victims, Nikki. That spoils the game."

"Let us repair to the scene of the crime," proclaimed Miss Porter, "and see what gives."

So, laughing and chattering and having a hell of a time, they all trooped through the archway, turned left, crossed the foyer, and went into the Crombie kitchen and found John Crombie dead on the floor with his throat cut.

When Ellery returned to the kitchen from his very interesting telephone chat with Inspector Queen, he found Ann Crombie being sick over the kitchen sink, her forehead supported by the greenish hand of a greenish Lucy Trent, and Nikki crouched quietly in a corner, as far away from the covered thing on the floor as the architect's plans allowed, while Jerry Baxter raced up and down weeping, "Where's my wife? Where's Edith? We've got to get out of here."

Ellery grabbed Baxter's collar and said, "It's going to be a long night, Jerry—relax. Nikki—"

"Yes, Ellery." She was trembling and trying to stop it and not succeeding.

"You know who was supposed to be the murderer in that foul game—the one who drew the ace of spades—you saw him or her step away from the living-room wall while the lights were still on in there. Who was it?"

"Edith Baxter. Edith got the ace. Edith was supposed to be the murderer."

Jerry Baxter jerked out of Ellery's grasp. "You're lying!" he yelled. "You're not mixing my wife up in this stink! You're lying—"

Ann crept away from the sink,

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avoiding the mound. She crept past them and went into the foyer and collapsed against the door of a closet just outside the kitchen. Lucy crept after Ann and cuddled against her, whimpering. Ann began to whimper, too.

"Edith Baxter was Murderer," said Nikki drearily. "In the game, anyway."

"You lie!—you lying—"

Ellery slapped his mouth without rancor and Baxter started to weep again. "Don't let me come back and find any other throats cut," said Ellery, and he went out of the kitchen.

It was tempting to assume the obvious, which was that Edith Baxter, having drawn the ace of spades, decided to play the role of murderer in earnest, and did so, and fled. Her malice-dipped triumph as she looked at John Crombie's wife, her anger as she watched Crombie pursue Nikki through the evening, told a simple story; and it was really unkind of fate—if fate was the culprit—to place Edith Baxter's hand on John Crombie's shoulder in the victim-choosing phase of the game. In the kitchen, with a bread knife at hand, who could blame a well-bourboned woman if she obeyed that impulse and separated Mr. Crombie's neck from his careless collar?

But investigation muddled the obvious. The front door of the suite was locked—nay, even bolted—on the inside. Nikki proclaimed herself the authoress thereof, having performed the sealed-apartment act before the game began (she said) in a moment of "inspiration."

Secondly, escape by one of the windows was out of the question, unless, like Pegasus, Edith Baxter possessed wings.

Thirdly, Edith Baxter had not attempted to escape at all: Ellery found her in the foyer closet against which the widow and her sister whimpered. Mrs. Baxter had been jammed into the closet by a hasty hand, and she was unconscious.

Inspector Queen, Sergeant Velie & Co. arrived just as Edith Baxter, with the aid of ammonium carbonate, was shuddering back to life.

"Guy named Crombie's throat slit?" bellowed Sergeant Velie, without guile.

Edith Baxter's eyes rolled over and Nikki wielded the smelling salts once more, wearily.

"Murder games," said Inspector Queen gently. "Halloween," said Inspector Queen. Ellery blushed. "Well, son?"

Ellery told his story humbly, in penitential detail.

"Well, we'll soon find out," grumbled his father, and he shook Mrs. Baxter until her chin waggled and her eyes flew open. "Come, come, madam, we can't afford these luxuries. What were you doing in that closet?"

Edith screamed, "How should I know?" and had a convulsion of

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tears. "Jerry Baxter, how can you sit there and—?"

But her husband was doubled over, holding his head.

"You received Nikki's instructions, Edith," said Ellery, "and when she turned off the light you left the living room and went to the kitchen. Or started for it. What did happen?"

"Don't third-degree me, you detective!" screeched Mrs. Baxter. "I'd just passed under the archway, feeling my way, when somebody grabbed my nose and mouth from behind and I must have fainted because that's all I knew till just now and Jerry Baxter, if you don't get up on your two feet like a man and defend your own wife, I'll—I'll—"

"Slit his throat?" asked Sergeant Velie crossly, for the Sergeant had been attending his own Halloween Party with the boys of his old precinct and was holding three queens full when the call to duty came.

"The murderer," said Ellery glumly. "The real murderer, Dad. At the time Nikki first put out the lights, while Edith Baxter was still in the room getting Nikki's final instructions, one of us against that wall stole across the room, passed Nikki, passed Edith Baxter in the dark, and ambushed her—"

"Probably intended to slug her," nodded the Inspector, "but Mrs. Baxter obliged by fainting first."

"Then into the closet and away to do the foul deed?" asked the Sergeant poetically.

"It would mean," mused Inspector Queen, "that after stowing Mrs. Baxter in the foyer closet, the real killer went into the kichen, got the mask, flash, and knife, came back to the living room, tapped John Crombie, led him out to the kitchen, and carved him up. That part of it's okay—Crombie must have thought he was playing the game—but how about the assault on Mrs. Baxter beforehand? Having to drag her unconscious body to the closet? Wasn't there any noise, any sound?"

Ellery said apologetically, "I kept dozing off."

But Nikki said, "There was no sound, Inspector. Then or at any other time. The first *sound* after I turned the light off was John screaming in the kitchen. The only other *sound* was the murderer throwing the flash into the middle of the room after he . . . she . . . whoever it was . . . got back to the wall."

Jerry Baxter raised his sweating face and looked at his wife.

"Could be," said the Inspector.

"Oh, my," said Sergeant Velie. He was studying the old gentleman as if he couldn't believe his eyes—or ears.

"It could be," remarked Ellery, "or it couldn't. Edith's a very small woman. Unconscious, she *could* be carried noiselessly the few feet in the foyer to the closet . . . by a reasonably strong person."

Immediately Ann Crombie and Lucy Trent and Jerry Baxter tried

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to look tiny and helpless, while Edith Baxter tried to look huge and heavy. But the sisters could not look less tall or soundly made than Nature had fashioned them, and Jerry's proportions, even allowing for reflexive shrinkage, were elephantine.

"Nikki," said Ellery in a very thoughtful way, "you're sure Edith was the only one to step away from the wall while the light was still on?"

"Dead sure, Ellery."

"And when the one you thought was Edith came back from the kitchen to pick a victim, that person had a full mask on?"

"You mean after I put the light out? Yes. I could see the mask in the glow the flash made."

"Man or woman, Miss P?" interjected the Sergeant eagerly. "This could be a pipe. If it was a man—"

But Nikki shook her head. "The flash was pretty weak, Sergeant. And we were all in those Black Cat outfits."

"Me, I'm no Fancy Dan," murmured Inspector Queen unexpectedly. "A man's been knocked off. What I want to know is not who was where when, but—who had it in for this character?"

It was a different sort of shrinkage this time, a shrinkage of four throats. Ellery thought: They *all* know.

"Whoever," he began casually, "whoever knew that John Crombie and Edith Baxter were—"

"It's a lie!" Edith was on her feet, swaying, clawing the air. "There was nothing between John and me. Nothing. Nothing! Jerry, don't believe them!"

Jerry Baxter looked down at the floor again. "Between?" he mumbled. "I guess I got a head. I guess this has got me." And, strangely, he looked not at his wife but at Ann Crombie. "Ann . . .?"

But Ann was jelly-lipped with fear.

"Nothing!" screamed Jerry's wife.

"That's not true." And now it was Lucy's turn, and they saw that she had been shocked into a sort of suicidal courage. "John was a . . . a . . . John made love to every woman he met. John made love to *me*—"

"To you." Ann blinked and blinked at her sister.

"Yes. He was . . . disgusting. I . . ." Lucy's eyes flamed at Edith Baxter with scorn, with loathing, with contempt. "But *you* didn't find him disgusting, Edith."

Edith glared back, giving hate for hate.

"You spent four week-ends with him. And the other night, at that dinner party, when you two stole off—you thought I didn't hear—but you were both tight . . . You begged him to marry you."

"You nasty little blabbermouth," said Edith in a low voice.

"I heard you. You said you'd divorce Jerry if he'd divorce Ann.

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And John kind of laughed at you, didn't he?—as if you were dirt. And I saw your eyes, Edith . . ."

And now they, too, saw Edith Baxter's eyes—as they really were.

"I never told you, Ann. I couldn't. I couldn't . . ." Lucy began to sob into her hands.

Jerry Baxter got up.

"Here, where d'ye think you're going?" asked the Sergeant, not unkindly.

Jerry Baxter sat down again.

"Mrs. Crombie, did you know what was going on?" asked Inspector Queen sympathetically.

It was queer how she would not look at Edith Baxter, who was sitting lumpily now, no threat to anyone—a soggy old woman.

And Ann said, stiff and tight, "Yes, I knew." Then her mouth loosened again and she said wildly, "I knew, but I'm a coward. I couldn't face him with it. I thought if I shut my eyes—"

"So do I," said Ellery tiredly.

"What?" said Inspector Queen, turning around. "You what, son? I didn't get you."

"I know who cut Crombie's throat."

They were lined up facing the far wall of the living room—Ann Crombie, Lucy Trent, Edith Baxter, and Jerry Baxter—with a space the breadth of a man, and a little more, between the Baxters. Nikki stood at the light switch, the Inspector and Sergeant Velie blocked the archway, and Ellery sat on a hassock in the center of the room, his hands dangling listlessly.

"This is how we were arranged a couple of hours ago, Dad, except that I was at the wall, too, and so was John Crombie . . . in that vacant space."

Inspector Queen said nothing.

"The light was still on, as it is now. Nikki had just asked Murderer to step away from the wall and cross the room—that is, towards where you are now. Do it, Edith."

"You mean—"

"Please."

Edith Baxter backed from the wall and turned and slowly picked her way around the overturned furniture. Near the archway she paused, an arm's length from the Inspector and the Sergeant.

"With Edith about where she is now, Nikki, in the full light, instructed her about going to the kitchen, getting the mask, flash, and knife there, coming back in the dark with the flash, selecting a victim, and so on. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"Then you turned off the light, Nikki—didn't you?"

"Yes . . ."

"Do it."

"D-do it, Ellery?"

"Do it, Nikki."

When the darkness closed down, someone at the wall gasped. And then the silence closed down, too.

And after a moment Ellery's voice came tiredly, "It was at this

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point, Nikki, that you said 'Stop!' to Edith Baxter and gave her a few additional instructions. About what to do after the 'crime.' As I pointed out a few minutes ago, Dad—it was during this interval, with Edith standing in the archway getting Nikki's afterthoughts, and the room in darkness, that the real murderer must have stolen across the living room from the wall, got past Nikki and Edith and into the foyer, and waited there to ambush Edith."

"Sure, son," said the Inspector. "So what?"

"How did the murderer manage to cross this room in pitch darkness without making any noise?"

At the wall Jerry Baxter said hoarsely, "Look, I don't have to stand here. I don't have to!"

"Because, you know," said Ellery, reflectively, "there wasn't any noise. None at all. In fact, Nikki, you actually remarked in that interval, 'I want the room to be as quiet as it is this minute.' And only a few moments ago you corroborated yourself when you told Dad that the first sound after you turned off the light was John screaming in the kitchen. You said that the only other sound was the sound of the flashlight landing in the middle of the room after the murderer got back to the wall. So I repeat: How did the murderer cross in darkness without making a sound?"

Sergeant Velie's disembodied bass complained from the archway that he didn't get it at all, at all.

"Well, Sergeant, you've seen this room—it's cluttered crazily with overturned furniture, pillows, hassocks, miscellaneous objects. Do you think *you* could cross it in darkness without sounding like the bull in the china shop? Nikki, when you and I first got here and blundered into the living room—"

"In the dark," cried Nikki. "We bumped. I actually fell—"

"Why didn't the murderer?"

"I'll tell you why," said Inspector Queen suddenly. "*Because no one did cross this room in the dark.* It can't be done without making a racket, or without a light—and there was no light at that time or Nikki'd have seen it."

"Then how's it add up, Inspector?" asked Velie pathetically.

"There's only one person we know crossed this room, the one Nikki saw cross while the light was on, the one they found in the closet in a 'faint,' Velie. *Edith Baxter!*"

She sounded nauseated. "Oh, no."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Baxter. It's been you all the time. You did get to the kitchen. You got the mask, the flash, the knife. You came back and tapped John Crombie. You led him out to the kitchen and there you sliced him—"

"No!"

"Then you quietly got into that closet and pulled a phony faint, and waited for them to find you so you could tell that cock-and-bull story of being ambushed in the foyer—"

"Dad," sighed Ellery.

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"Huh?" And because the old man's memory of similar moments was very green, his tone became truculent. "Now tell me I'm wrong, Ellery!"

"Edith Baxter is the one person present tonight who couldn't have killed John Crombie."

"You sese?" moaned Edith.

"Nikki actually saw somebody with a flash *return* to the living room after Crombie's death scream, go to the wall, turn off the flash, and she heard that person hurl it into the middle of the room. Who was it Nikki saw and heard? We've deduced that already—the actual murderer. Immediately after that, Nikki turned up the lights.

"If Edith Baxter were the murderer, wouldn't we have found her *at the wall with the rest of us* when the lights went on? But she wasn't. She wasn't in the living room at all. We found her in the foyer closet. So she *had* been attacked. She *did* faint. She *didn't* kill Crombie."

They could hear her sobbing.

"Then who did?" barked the Inspector.

"The one who was able to cross the room in the dark without making any noise. For if Edith is innocent, one of those at the wall must be guilty. And that one had to cross the room."

"But how, son, how?" bellowed his father. "It couldn't be done without knocking *something* over—making *some* noise!"

"Only one possible explanation," said Ellery tiredly; and then he said, not tiredly at all, but swiftly and with the slashing finality of a knife, "I thought you'd try that. That's why I sat on the hassock, so very tired. That's why I staged this whole . . . silly . . . scene."

Velie was roaring, "Where the hell are the lights? Miss Porter, turn that switch on, will you?"

"I can't find the—the damned thing!" wept Nikki.

"The rest of you stay where you are!" shouted the Inspector.

"Now drop the knife," said Ellery, in the slightly gritty tones of one who is exerting pressure. "Drop it . . ." There was a little clatter, and then a whimper. "The only one who could have passed through this jumbled maze in the dark without stumbling over anything," Ellery went on, "would be someone who'd *plotted a route through this maze in advance of the party* . . . someone, in fact, who'd plotted the maze. In other words, the clutter in this room is not chance confusion, but deliberate plant. It would require photographing the details of the obstacle course on the memory, and practice, plenty of practice—but we were told you spent the entire day in this suite *alone*, fixing it up for the party."

"Here!" sobbed Nikki, and she jabbed the light switch.

"I imagine," said Ellery gently to the girl in his grip, "you felt *someone* had to avenge the honor of the Trents, Lucy."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 286th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a get-under-your-skin "first story" that reveals the heart and mind of a deep-woods man—the kind of man who must live outdoors, free as the wild creatures he loves . . . an impressive "first."

The author, Miss M. L. Dunn, writes from the truest and most satisfying of all sources—first-hand knowledge. She was raised on the edge of the East Texas deep woods where the sounds and smells and sights of woodlands and bogs and sand farms made an ineradicable impression on her senses. She admits now that she has always been a little sorry she left the deep woods to become a school librarian, although she loves working with children and has grown to appreciate the advantages of living in a city. Still, she says, "on a blazing summer day there is something about the hot satin feel of that white sand between your toes that you never quite forget."

We look forward to more stories—so authentically felt and told—by Miss Dunn . . .

THEY'S THINGS IN THE DEEP WOODS

by M. L. DUNN

THEY'S THINGS IN THE DEEP woods that not ever'one knows. They's places in the deep woods that not ever'one goes.

But we go. We Hartleys go ever' place but one. And that not because we have a fear of it. There is an evil on it for us—an evil like to a curse.

It is a wet place, a sour place, a quicksandy place, a sinky place where the sun never shows. Reaching high over it they's pine and cypress, mulberry and gum, all woven together with a thick mat of mustang grapevine. On it grows the saw-edged palmetto and the eating plants; the sundew, the flytraps, the Jack-in-the-Pulpit. And they's other things grow there too—bigger things that can't be named with a name because no science man has ever seen 'em to write 'em down.

They's no animal tracks in the bog to speak of. The cinnamon bears, which we don't mention often 'cause they's such a few and

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we don't want 'em killed out; the yellow panthers; the other cats, bobs and ringtails; the piney woods rooters.

All the deer and wild cattle avoid the bog. They don't like its quivery ground. They won't drink its sour water nor eat its lush green grass. They's even some deer, no matter how panic-stricken, who will back up to the edge to fight or be torn apart by the dogs rather than step on that ground . . .

We're the Hartleys of Newton County. My Pa was known by name to the big fur companies in his time. Hotter weather and the coming of the ratlike neutra have just about done for the pelt furring in these woods. Too, lumbering has taken great chunks of the virgin wood and with it has gone the breeding grounds of the best pelt animals.

Pa saw it coming long before. When the war come on, he left us kids and Ma and went to the shipyards at Orange to a job as a welder. Sometimes he worked two shifts a day, made near $1000 dollars a month, figurin' in some lucky poker; and when the shipyards eased off, he come home with near $40,000. Big money to a woods man.

He put it in the land. Starting with the bog, for the woods is deepest there about, Pa put a circle on the map in Banker Collwell's office and said, "This is what I want for mine. Go as far in ever' direction as that money'll take me."

Land was pretty cheap right then. Folks had left their homes, their grubbing bumblebee sand farms, for the big city money, and the bank held a chunk of that land. The county owned some of it for taxes, and cash money looked good to the bank. So we owned the land, a great tract near 3000 acres that shaped up like Churchill's fist with two chubby fingers extended.

But then there wasn't any money left, not even for taxes, so we all had to pitch in to secure it, and tie that tract down all safe and sure for us and ours forever.

We'd been tadpoles when Pa went away, but we's good-size toads when he come home. The Skipper, Rob, he was 19; Elmer was 17; and me, I'm Andy, was 16. Our sister Louise, between Skipper and El, was determined to be a schoolteacher, so Pa shipped her off to college as soon as she finished high school and she never come home to the woods much after.

The Skipper, he liked the trees. From the time he first saw a peckerwood miller fell one of the big ones, he liked to hear 'em fall. They was more to Skipper than destroying. He liked to watch 'em grow too. He read all the books on Forestry that he could understand and he walked in the tracks of any timber man or Forest Service man that come around. They was always wanting him to go to college, but

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Pa couldn't afford to send two, and a man can always make his own way.

El wasn't much. He hung around the house mostly. Read books and helped Ma some when the second batch of kids started comin'. They was finally two more boys and a girl in that batch.

I never got to know them too well for by then I was a woods man like Pa. I come home when I was hungry or wanted a change of clothes. I had what I needed—my gun for hunting, my knife for digging and skinning; and a tin box of matches. I was never much for killing, bein' more of a watcher. The best is to stand against a tree so still that a bobcat walks down a limb in front, looks you in the eyes, snuffs your hair, snorts, twitches his stub of a tail, and trots off about his business.

I know where the deer and the pigs feed, and when. I know where the cinnamon bears den up. I've stood near by an old tom and watched one of the big cats bring her kittens.

Like I knew ever' tree in our woods, I knew the bog. I knew to the root where its boundaries were, and I knew when I stopped walking on damp earth and started walking on danger. But they's ways of going in the bog, tree root to tree root, grass tuft to fallen limb, and never, never steppin' where the water stands.

It was according to what we knew best and liked that Pa put us to making money to keep the land.

My job was the hunters. $500 a year bought a lease—all the squirrel a hunter could kill, wild pigs if he could find 'em, and a guaranteed buck in season. I put the hunters in their stands far enough apart so they wouldn't likely shoot each other and sometimes I Judased a buck up to a good shoooting position for a dumb one.

They was the fox and 'coon hunters. City men bred and raised hounds but lacked the woods to run 'em in. For $15 a hound a night, we provided the campsite, the big fire, and the roast meat which was always venison, though called by common consent "wild cow." The hunters brought their own bottle or jug and while the dogs packed through the night, they sat around yarnin' and passin' the jug, listening occasionally to a particularly beautiful passage of yodels from the distant hounds. Our woods being what they were, the hounds seldom caught their fox or 'coon, but if they did, we could spare 'em.

Skipper had the hardest job. They was heavy timber on the two fingers of land that reached out from the main tract. On those two fingers Pa decided we could sell out the big stuff—first the pine, later the hardwood—and still not destroy the woods. He hired independent loggers and Skipper marked the trees to be cut, watching

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to see that they did their work without tearing up the young hardwood or the young pine.

Between the tracts we had decided to work was land owned mostly by a stubborn old sand farmer named Rodriguez. He and Pa had tangled when we was buying land and he wouldn't sell, even for more than his land was worth stripped clean like it was. How he managed to live and feed all those kids was more than anyone could figure. We knew for a fact that he never hunted—he didn't own a gun. But they stayed well fleshed out and seemed happy enough for all their strange ways.

El turned out to be a wizard at figures, so he kept books on all the operations. At the end of one year he reckoned two more good ones like it and the land would have paid for itself—and this not counting the surplus Jeep and the brand-new pickup truck we'd bought. We didn't count the new house either for it only cost us a little more'n labor to get it built. The logs—clapboard is out of place in the woods—came off our land and so did the finishing lumber inside. The mills worked it out for us so that it didn't cost much.

Rodriguez, who could always use extra money, was a fair cabinet man. He did most of the inside finishing work—well too, better than his own little house. Sy Garnett, who owned the plumbing supply house in town and who had gotten three good bucks last fall and was grateful, helped out with the fancy fixtures. Even did some of the installing himself when he wasn't busy with his civic duties, he being the County Sheriff too.

When it was done, we had a very modern house in the deep woods. One to be proud of. In a way though, it was that house that started the big trouble.

Rodriguez had a daughter 16 years old. Dark-skinned, black-eyed, black-haired, Maria was right pretty. She drove her daddy over in their rattly old truck ever' day and picked him up ever' night while he was working on the house.

When El was home, which was often, Maria took to "visiting Ma" and "playing with the kids." What she was doing though was letting that long black hair fall over her shoulders as she bent over a little one so that the hair parted on her neck and covered her face. When she knew he was looking, she would cast a sloe-eyed, sideways look at El and you could see the shivers run down his back.

It was no contest. She had him by the horns before that house was done.

Being a watcher, I seen it first and brought it up casual to Pa. I knew how he felt about the Mexicans. He said nothing, but spent more time around the house, finding distant work for El to do in town or on the land. But that didn't stop it. When the house was fin-

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ished, the Rodriguezes no longer coming around, El and Maria still met, secretly, in the woods. I knew it, and I reckoned Pa did too.

One winter night El took the Jeep, said he was going to town to a show. Ma, Pa, Skipper, and I were enjoying the new fireplace, made out of petrified wood I'd drug away from the edge of the sinky hole in the bog. I was cleaning a gun, Skipper reading, Ma sewing something as usual, when Pa took the head of Maggie, his redbone hound, between his knees. He began to pull her ears affectionately and knead her scalp in the way she liked best.

"Ma," he said after a spell of quiet, "they's no good in a mixed hound."

She knew he hadn't finished, so she nodded without speaking and went on rockin'.

"Had Maggie here ever come up with a litter of white pups I'da knocked 'em in the head. Her too for being such a damn fool."

"Well," Ma said, rubbing Maggie's spine with her foot, "Mag's a right sensible dog." Then, after a bit, "Or are you talking about Maggie?"

Pa didn't answer but went on playing with the old hound. Skipper and I looked at each other without speaking. Ever'thing had been said.

The weeks eased by with no further hints of trouble and it all passed from our minds. Skipper and El worked in the timber when the weather allowed and I, liking the woods to myself, moved to the outer parts to check on the best deer runs, spotting the big bucks, when Pa started walking the bog. What he did there I didn't know. But it was certain a quiet place, a thinkin' place, and we let him be.

One day while I sat watching the piney woods rooters snoot up the first spring mayapples, I heard a soft step behind and turned slowly so as not to upset the pigs. Pa motioned me to him and I rose and followed him for some ways before he spoke.

"Did you ever see the bog turn?"

"No," said I. "But I've heard it casts up things it's swallered—bones and such."

"That's so," Pa said. "She's turning now. I want you should see. Man don't likely see it more'n once in a whole lifetime." He smiled at me. We walked on in silence.

Long before we come to the bog we could smell it. The fresh spring breeze of the woods went stale, then sour with an old smell—not so much of rotted flesh, though that was there too, but more of decaying leaves and roots and stale, stagnant water.

Besides the smell of the turning, another thing was troublin' me—the thought of Pa getting old. He had never needed no walk-way before, but from the edge of the bog I saw that Pa had made him a wide walk-way out of broad-leafed limbs,

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heavily needled pine branches, and bits and scraps of lumber. It was wide enough for two or three to walk abreast and went from the sandy road up the hill, over the soft ground of the bog, right down to the sinky hole where the turnin' over was.

I took in a breath of surprise. There was not six inches of water on top any more and all the scummy growth had completely disappeared. There was just muck—a reddish-gray muck that roiled and bubbled with foul gases from below. There was a hint of sulphur and I said softly to Pa, "It's some hellish!" Pa nodded agreement pointing to the edges of the pool.

Where I had taken the petrified wood for our fireplace there now lay other muck-covered lumps that by their size and shape were more of the petrified wood—enough perhaps to line out that flower place Ma wanted. A huge knobbed thing rose slowly. We grasped it together and pulled and were astonished. It was like the leg bone of a mule, but five times longer—as long as I was tall almost.

"A dinosaur bone?" I asked.

"Maybe," Pa said as he tipped it over into the muck to sink again from sight in less than a minute.

A broad, flat skull came up almost at our feet. I hooked a finger into its eye socket and lifted it up. One long curving tusk remained attached which I worked loose and pocketed.

"I saw a picture once of a saber-toothed tiger. Looked something like this."

We watched till dark. Once a fine set of horns rose up and I pointed them to Pa.

"That's the only big thing I ever seen go in," I told him. "I was about a hundred yards behind with Maggie. That old buck turned into the bog, jumped here, but didn't clear. When I got there, wasn't nothing showing but a muddy place."

Pa nodded. "It's a fast one. If they's got to be a sinky hole, its good it's a fast one."

We headed home in companionable silence, each thinking his own thoughts about the turning of the bog.

She rolled for two more days. Stones and bones and petrified wood lined its once clean edges. Finally the muck settled. The water rose over it clear and still, and soon was as stagnant as it ever was.

In the late spring ever'thing happened. Good, soaking rains had blessed the farmer and the woods man alike, putting a good season in the ground for both of them. Though we liked the rain, it was hard on the loggers. The ground was soft ever'where. Pa and El and I pitched into the timbering, helping to find track that the heavy-loaded trucks could run on.

We were deep in digging out a truck that was sunk to the frame when we heard the rattle and sput-

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ter of Rodriguez' old pickup. We were too busy to more than look up and nod greeting. Seeing the fix, he reached a spare shovel and worked in beside Pa. The wheels come clear at last and we worked leafy oak limbs and bushy pine branches under the wheels to make grip for the tires. Rodriguez leaned back on the shovel and spoke softly for only my Pa to hear.

"You know my girl, Maria?"

Pa didn't look at him, but nodded.

"She is with the child of your Elmer."

Pa cast him a cold-eyed glance and said simply, "I figured it."

"He will marry her, yes?" Rodriguez was not begging, nor threatening, just asking.

Elmer broke in, "I want to, Pa. I'm in love with her."

Pa neither looked at El nor answered him. "This is Tuesday," he said to Rodriguez. "Friday night suit you?"

Rodriguez was delirious with joy. He had not dreamed it would be so easily done.

He wasn't the only one surprised. When Rodriguez first spoke to Pa, I expected the whole woods to burn with a bright blue fire. Pa's calmness shook me off balance and Skipper and I spoke of it after.

"I guess he knew it was coming. Had his mind made to it," Skipper said.

I didn't exactly agree but I didn't argue. Knowing Pa though, I was disquieted when there wasn't some cussing over this thing he felt so strong on.

Wednesday morning, Pa took me along when he took El to town to arrange for the marrying on Friday. After we saw the preacher, Pa led the way to the bank. The Banker Collwell was some surprised when Pa asked for ten one-hundred-dollar bills. He clapped El on the back and congratulated him when Pa told of the marrying. Then he surprised Pa and pleased him when he got out another hundred of his own to tuck in El's pocket. He could afford to be generous to good customers.

"Help you out on your honeymoon, El." he said as he patted it into El's shirt pocket. "How long you plan to stay?"

"Oh, we ain't coming back, Mr. Collwell," El laughed. "Maria and me, we're going to get us a little place in the city. Live amongst people for a while. I never been too much on the woods."

"That's a fact," Pa agreed dryly.

On the way out of the bank Pa rolled the bills in a hard roll and tucked 'em in his pocket. "I'll give the money to Maria when you're wed. It's precious little else she's getting."

The sarcasm was not lost on El, but he ignored it and went happily on buying new shoes and some traveling clothes.

After supper Wednesday, Pa went into the woods walking, looking, thinking. I caught a glimpse of him

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Thursday near the bog and again in the deep woods early Friday morning. It was like he was saying goodbye to all those woodlands for El, who didn't have the sense to do it for himself. I didn't seek him out or speak when he passed close to where I was watching. It was a time for him to be loning.

Come Friday noon, Pa come in hungry and dirty. He cleaned up and helped pack El's things in the Jeep. Then Pa did a different thing. He squeezed Ma till she squealed, tossed the little kids in the air amid hoots of laughter, playing around happier than he had seemed in a long time. He clapped the Skipper on the back and punched me on the arm as he climbed under the wheel of the Jeep. He and El waved and shouted, "Goodbye, goodbye," until they were hidden in the trees.

We all sighed our relief over a last cup of coffee as the dark moonless night came on.

In the morning Pa nor the Jeep was in the yard. "Likely tied into a jug," Ma said and went on dishing oatmeal to the kids and tending flapjacks for Skipper and me.

When Skipper went about his tree cutting and Ma to her gardening, I was too uneasy to go with either. There was a dropped-down feeling in my belly that wouldn't go away. When I seen the Sheriff, Sy Garnett, driving up, not in his friendly red hunting truck, but in the official county car, I feared there was trouble sure enough.

I stepped up to Sy's door and he slid out, a little man, deceptively bulky.

"Your Pa been home, Andy?"

I noed him with my head. "He ain't in town?" I asked.

He noed me back and we looked at each other soberly for a moment. Sy took a deep breath. "Mrs. Rodriguez called me about six this morning. Her husband went along to see Maria got married right. When he wasn't home by sunup she got worried. I called the preacher and they never did come in to get wed."

"Pa's not likely to get lost between here and town. He does run without lights some to keep from blinding the little creatures."

"He didn't go off the road anywhere, Andy. I've been over it."

I began to shake as a thought come over me. "You better go get Skipper, Sy. He's logging hardwood over near the Rodriguez place."

"I'll find it by the saws," he nodded, and started off.

I called after him, "Tell Skipper to head in toward the bog. I'll meet you there."

Part of what happened, I suspicioned—enough to make me cold and sick; but I didn't even suspicion all of it until I crossed the Jeep tracks. Going fast it was, judgin' from the way the sand was thrown away from the edges of the curves. Going fast down the hill, onto the branch and lumber walk-way, be-

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yond it into the mucky pit of the sinky hole.

The water was still. The muck had settled. Only the green scum thrown back from the center showed that something big had sunk there in the night.

I stood staring and shaking until the Sheriff and Skipper came up. Sy put his arm over my shoulders. "We followed the tracks."

I looked at both of them. "Pa always said if they had to be a sinky hole, it was good it was a fast one." Then I cried a bit, for I loved my Pa very much.

"He gave ever'thing he had to this land," Skipper said. "I reckon we can take care of it for him."

Sy patted him affectionately. He talked as he began picking up branches and lumber from Pa's carefully laid walk-way, tossing them into the sinky hole to disappear forever. "Terrible thing, boys. Running without lights like he done, your Pa musta got off his track some in the dark. The sand being soft, I reckon he lost control of the Jeep. Run right into that sinky hole before he could stop." The last sign of the little road disappeared into the muck. "I'll just get into town and bring the coroner on out here."

There was some fuss, of course. Newspapers nosed around for a bit until one of the cameramen stepped too close to the edge and only me grabbing his collar kept him from joining Pa. He lost his camera and all his interest in the sinky hole. The Hartley tragedy wore itself out soon and they let us be.

That's all the story except that Mrs. Rodriguez tired of working that sand farm after a while. We bought it for twice what it was worth. Got our money back though, when we leased the mineral rights off it later.

Oh, and one more thing. Coming home from town the day we went to arrange El's marrying, I remember how Pa was teasing me about how lucky I was.

"You could put your hand in a porcupine's den," he said, "and come out with a fistful of money."

I took it as joking at the time, but long after Pa was gone I recollected his words and they meant something to me. I went to the place deep in the woods where, as a boy, I'd hid out an extra knife and tins of dry matches—an old porcupine den. In it was a lone tin and $1000—ten hundreds—neatly rolled inside.

I used half of it on a Florida honeymoon when Jenny Sue Garnett, Sy's middle daughter, and I wed. I've saved the other half for Skipper when he picks his woman. I'm sure she'll be the right kind.

The Hartleys still walk the woods but we never go near the bog. Once I thought I smelled that stale, sour smell of the bog when it turns. The next breeze brought fresh sweet air. I haven't been down to see.

They's places in the deep woods that even I don't go.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 287th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an amusing and lighthearted incident in suburbia (though not without its serious undertones) by a new writer with a deftly humorous touch . . .

The author, Mrs. Vincent O. Ladd, is a harried, harassed homemaker who attached to her "first story" a letter too delicious to be ignored. She apologized for writing the letter in longhand—"this is not so much a violation of the cardinal rule of manuscript-submitting as it is simple necessity, since my children respond to the sound of typing like pyromaniacs to a fire siren . . . Thinking ceased to be a habit with me about seven years ago, when the first of my five children was born. I plan to resume quiet contemplation at some future time—when the children have left home. I also plan to have a complete nervous breakdown, along with the myriad of other luxuriously self-indulgent maladies being held in abeyance until I have time for them."

Mrs. Ladd's second letter, about the trials and tribulations of child-raising, was even funnier; but we'll restrain ourselves and remember to quote from it when—hopefully—we publish another story, gay and grim, by the long-suffering Mrs. Ladd whose husband, by the way, just happens to be a State Park policeman by night and a law student by day. It was Mr. Ladd's decision to become a tyro law student that, Mrs. Ladd wrote, "galvanized me into trying to write for profit as well as therapy."

TIGER IN THE CELLAR

by JOAN D. LADD

WE LIVE IN A SUBURBAN HOUSE which could be described as ideal for a retired couple. Unfortunately, we are not a retired couple—so the house is home to my husband, myself, and four small, loud, heavy-footed children. My husband is that awesomely endowed type of person who is not really at ease unless he is employing mind and body to full capacity at all times; for the past three years he has been a police

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patrolman nights and a law student by day.

While I've gone along with this schedule cheerfully, occasionally giving in to a vision of the future and a house with lockable bathrooms every few feet, a separate bedroom for every child, and a household staff that would include a personal maid and a laundress with the dedication of a missionary, there have been times when I've regarded Tom's full life as a sneaky, underhanded way to get out of the house.

"But I *love* you," he's protested time and again.

"Ha! Then why do you leave me in the hands of these savages?" I've said, tripping over a plastic toy while avoiding a child intent on murdering a sibling.

"They're nice kids," he's said loyally.

"If they're so nice, why do you prefer to go gallivanting after the cream of society's criminal element rather than stay home with them?"

"But what good would it do at night?"

"Well, when do you think they dig the screws out of the doors?"

Since he has worked a midnight shift ever since we got married, being alone nights has never bothered me—not that I've been alone since ten months after our wedding, when the first little Winslow appeared. To those who expressed concern over the vast expanse of back yard the contractor neglected to take advantage of while building our house, I've always pointed out the closeness of one neighbor, the phone extension in our bedroom, and my own little four-child army, who, believe me, would give Attila the Hun pause. Besides, some day we plan to install a strong floodlight in back—that is, if we ever get around to it.

With Tom's crammed schedule, there are many things we somehow never get around to. That's why it was two years before we finally moved the kids to the upstairs bedrooms and took the downstairs room for ourselves—a procedure just a little less involved than the reconstruction of San Francisco after the famous earthquake. Although the upper floor is warmer in summer, the kids thought it was delightful to have any air at all, because I've always closed and locked their windows at night as an acknowledgment of respect to that vast back yard.

It was a typical evening a week or two after the big move. The kids had played tidal wave in the bath tub, left the usual layer of topsoil to be scrubbed out, had their daily quotas of mosquito bites, sunburn, scratches, and mysterious abrasions ministered to, taken the vitamin pills I had convinced them they could not survive the night without, and gone upstairs to re-enact the Second World War.

When they finally fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, it was nearly time

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for Tom to leave for work. Ordinarily, his departure is the beginning of a regular orgy of watching the Late Show on TV and enjoying the pagan luxury of being all by myself. That night, though, was hot—that sticky, stifling sort of hot that saps whatever energy one might have. In fact, it was so hot that I decided on the lesser pleasure of a bath uninterrupted by a single irate, injured, or curious child.

After the bath I clambered into a pair of baby-doll pajamas, a relic of the dimly remembered era of prenuptial showers, turned out the living-room light, averting my face from the toys I had left where they had fallen, and dropped into bed. It occurred to me in the few seconds before I succumbed to sleep that the windows in the den were still open—but I couldn't bear to think of closing them on the ghost of a breeze that floated in from the back yard. And Tom might decide to stop by, as he often did when he was in the patrol car—but tonight he could darned well pour his own glass of milk.

When I awoke it was with the familiar alertness that usually meant a child had coughed or cried out. The luminous dial of the clock showed I'd been asleep only half an hour. It occurred to me that Tom could have come in; like many big men, he is uncannily quiet. I've told him he's the only one I know who can tiptoe a car into a driveway. I waited for the sound of the refrigerator door, or some other indication that he was home; but I heard nothing. Nor was there any sign of light in the kitchen.

I lay awake for a few minutes, sure I had heard nothing after all, but unwilling to give in to instant sleep as I wanted to. I suppose it was that blasted maternal instinct that I've stoutly maintained for years is a fictitious invention: one keeps one's children out of the streets and away from rat paste because society frowns severely on one who doesn't. The old theoretical problem of what you would do if you suddenly discovered a Bengal tiger in your cellar was one I have avoided going into in depth—since I had an uneasy conviction that I would turn tail and run and let the kids fend for themselves.

I was visualizing a Bengal tiger in our cellar, grinning drowsily at the mental image of the poor beast breaking down entirely in the midst of those lethal playthings strewn about so casually, when again I heard the sound that had wakened me. There *was* someone in the den. Someone had stepped on a creaking floorboard and quickly withdrawn the revealing foot.

It was like being the victim of one of those paralyzing ray guns so popular in the childrens' cartoon shows. But if every muscle inside me was rigid, my mind was not. From some subconscious filing cabinet of miscellaneous information came total recall of everything I had

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ever heard or read about housebreakers.

Not one item that popped into my mind was calculated to soothe the nerves or cheer the heart. There had been a television interview with a police detective who had cautioned against any display of bravado when faced with the problem of a burglar loose in the house. It now occurred to me that this was a singularly frivolous warning; in view of the fact that I found it necessary to remind myself to breathe at regular intervals, any display of bravado seemed pretty unlikely.

What on earth could a burglar want in our house? Our block, while in a good section of town, was sort of tagged on to the really prosperous area over the protests of those who considered any home costing less than $50,000 tenanted by peasants. Whoever this was probably knew that I was alone here with the children, that my husband left every night before midnight, that Tom was—a policeman.

Guns. That was it.

Professional housebreakers who scent a chance to steal a weapon are the most vicious sort of criminal—yes, that was what the detective on TV had said. I thought of the rifle, the shotgun, the various pistols and cartons of shells tucked away in a special hardwood cabinet constructed by Tom's father, a man of great skill and shrewdness who had installed a combination padlock to stave off the onslaught of the clever little fingers his grandchildren used so devilishly well.

The intruder was going into the hall—I could just barely hear the cautious steps. He was almost completely silent about it, but when you've spent seven years developing the kind of ears that can catch the sound of your good face powder striking a bathmat, the prowler's movements were as clear as though he were doing a flamenco all the way.

From the filing cabinet in my memory came a sentence from a magazine article written by an ex-housebreaker giving advice to householders. Make a sound, it said; cough, move in bed heavily—friend housebreaker, after all, isn't anxious to be caught. The trespasser was heading for our bedroom. The door was pushed open slowly, stealthily, and I saw the infinitesimal beam of a tiny flashlight pointed toward the floor.

Me make a noise? Why, I was so petrified I was afraid to close my eyes for fear the loud thud might suggest a state less than total coma.

The pinkie of light crept across the floor to the side window, started for the bed, and I decided to risk closing my eyes. I tried not to think about the burglar looking at me, so I thought instead of all the things I could do in just such a situation. One neighbor was close by, yes, but among the things we never got around to doing was replacing the screen the kids had torn a hole

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in. Consequently, that side window was not only shut tight, but still had the storm window on the outside.

The telephone by the bed might have been valuable in such a situation ten or more years ago, but these days it is necessary to dial rather than speak to the operator, and in the silence of a house as small as ours the sound of a clacking dial would have been as noticeable as the noise of that window being shattered.

The burglar was leaving the room. My eyes snapped open again in time to see the door being pulled nearly shut again. Now, why would he do that? Didn't he realize this was the master bedroom, that anything of value to him would more than likely be here?

The ray gun blasted me again. I had been assuming that this was a casual sort of burglar who had only a sketchy knowledge of us and our routine. But what if he were not? What if he were someone from our area, or someone who had spent a lot of time researching this job?—"casing the joint," as Tom would say. What if he assumed, naturally enough, that Tom and I slept upstairs, or had seen Tom cleaning his rifle at the upstairs window, as he often did?

I turned my head toward the side window, wildly considering throwing something through it—maybe the phone. And I saw what he had seen. The curtains, with their bright print of teddy bears and toy blocks and rag dolls.

He was now entering the living room, and in a moment he would be going upstairs to the kids' rooms in search of the guns. And the cabinet was still up there. I sat bolt upright in bed, imagining the burglar squatting in front of the padlock. Unless he was also an expert safecracker, he would have to force that lock. And forcing the lock would mean noise—more than enough noise to wake the children.

What would a gun-seeking housebreaker do if he were suddenly confronted by a crying child?

I saw my children—my two beautiful girls with their ridiculously long eyelashes and dazzling smiles, my two boys destined for the collegiate football Hall of Fame before they went on to the United States Senate. Then I saw them sprawled bonelessly in their beds, transformed by sleep from sworn enemies of authority to Christmas card angels.

I roared up and off the bed, headed straight and unerringly for Tom's Sharpshooter Award on the desk, thankful that second prize was a gratifyingly heavy bronze statuette instead of a medal, and opened the door.

So this interloper thought children's curtains and baby-doll pajamas meant he was dealing with a child, did he? He thought he would invade the privacy of my

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home and harm my children, did he? The hell he would!

Ten minutes later I was sitting at the kitchen table draped in a large police-uniform jacket which Tom has hastily snatched from one of the officers crowded into our little house, holding half a juice glass of brandy, and heard myself bellowing, "Would somebody *please* tell me what happened?"

The Chief of Police himself lumbered out of the living room and grinned at me. "You caught yourself a housebreaker," he said. "Near as we can figure it, the guy turned around quick when he heard you coming at him and, judging by the hole gouged in your wall, he threw this—" he extended an extremely ugly metal object which had to be a wire cutter "—at your head. And he probably would have connected, too, if it hadn't been for his stumbling over that."

The Chief pointed to the man behind him, who was also grinning, and the man moved forward to show us the large mangy remains of a child's teddy bear.

"And then I hit him," I said.

"And then you beat him four inches into the floor," Tom said, not without pride. "What in the name of all that's holy possessed you to go after him?"

Just about then, one of the wide-awake kids went into his imitation of a whirling dervish and two more began to battle over a pair of handcuffs obligingly loaned to them by an officer. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," I said.

We learned the next morning that the housebreaker was the skeleton in the closet of a neighbor—a ne'er-do-well brother who had been watching our house for months.

It took a while to get it through to the kids that they were not to go around telling people their mother could beat up anybody in the world, and Tom took quite a ribbing from the other men at the station who tempered calling him "Killer's Mate" by telling him I'd been unanimously voted the Police Department's Award for the Officer With the Best-Looking Legs.

We installed that floodlight on the back of the house, and Tom brought home a dog—not a puppy, but a dog, a full-grown monster that someone in the K-9 Corps had procured for him. "What does it eat?" I asked, watching that contemporary Cerberus cover the length of a football field in a few strides. "Half a whale every day?" The dog turned out to be the biggest softie in the city, but he has a really intimidating growl.

All in all, it was quite an experience. Sometimes, when it seems as though the monsoon season is upon us and I'm up to my ears in kids, noise, toys, and nervous tics, I find a lot of consolation in the fact that at least I don't have to wonder any more what I'd do about a tiger in the cellar.

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Perhaps you won't like this story. Caveat lector—we warn you in advance. But even if you don't like "The Seeker of Ultimates," even if you hate the story intensely, you will agree, we're sure, that it should be read.

The suspense in this story is of a very special kind; it held us transfixed—and frightened. It may terrify you too. One thing is certain: "The Seeker of Ultimates" is perhaps the most unusual Halloween story written in our time . . .

THE SEEKER OF ULTIMATES

by JOE GORES

A YEAR AGO I WOULD HAVE CHALlenged the inexorability of time. I would have proved, by adroit use of Einstein's clock paradox, that time is like all else relative. But since it has become an active physical entity like heavy water or the next martini—easy on the vermouth, please—I court its vaunted curative powers. Minutes, seconds, hours, creeping in their petty pace from day to day, have become like individual atoms and Angstroms and molecules to me. I try desperately to acknowledge that they knit up all the ravelled sleeves save death, yet know that their demise brings me inexorably closer to my own.

More than most men I fear that moment—not because oblivion might lie beyond it, but because oblivion might not. Or is this merely a morbid fancy born of long hours spent not talking with Pendennis?

Since the night of the storm he is incapable of speech; the doctors claim there is no physical reason, but to me the cause is the extreme *physicalness* of what happened. My own reaction has been much less flamboyant; each night I soak out consciousness of the passing hours —time again—and each afternoon I wait in the cool dim sanitarium for the ineffable word he never utters. Energy and matter? Natural law? Divine effulgence—yes, I would accept even that; but Pendennis says nothing. Hence the geometric progression of martinis.

I joined Pendennis' staff three months after my Ph.D; my dissertation on particle energies (pion and lambda particles tracked as a single unit, Y*, causing in an observed pion a recoil action $K^- + p^+ \rightarrow Y^{*+} + \pi^-$) had got me the position of his assistant without even a personal interview. Conceptual nuclear physics is not a crowded

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field. Since I carried my individuality fiercely, like a falcon on my wrist, I arrived with the previous day's whiskers glinting golden on my narrow fox jaw, wearing windbreaker, striped T-shirt, Army fatigues—the old style with the baggy pockets outside—and strap sandals with a thong around my big toe.

The university was term-break deserted. In the Physical Sciences Building I wandered down bright corridors and stopped to peer out into golden California; since my graduate work had been under Hill at Illinois, a snowless land on a January morning could still hold my interest. I turned to the lone man clumping energetically by.

"Could you direct me to Dr. Pendennis' office?"

He was a large untidy person, wearing a baggy tweed suit the way a hippo wears its skin, and square-toed brogues more suited to a Celtic peat bog than vinyl and aluminum windows. With his bulbous nose, thick lips, and thinning curly hair he looked like an itinerant Irish poet.

"Dr. Pendennis' office," I repeated sharply. It woke him up.

"Who the hell are you, the new janitor?"

"Pendennis' new assistant. And they call them maintenance men."

"Nuts," he said belligerently. I didn't know if he meant me or the janitors. He pulled a frowsty brier from his pocket and clamped it between strong incisors while his clear blue eyes crawled over me like staphylococci. "That would make you Shaw."

"Thomas Shaw."

"Doubting Thomas," he persisted.

"Because I never take a lesser man's word for anything." The gross-bodied boob was beginning to annoy me: just another glorified test-tube washer.

"Or a better man's word?"

"In my field I haven't met him."

He laughed out loud at that, putting his feet wide apart and crossing his arms on his chest like an I.R.A. man with a tommygun in the crook of his arm. For an instant something rare and almost shocking peeped from his pale blue eyes: naked intellect. His face was not any longer that of a faintly debauched cherub dancing on the head of a pin, but that of an Aquinas able to set the cherub whirling there.

"We'll get along. I'm Pendennis. Find me a way to convert the Regge poles quantum theory from math to physics and apply it to resonance particles, and the beer is on me."

Soon we were giving several nights a week to suds and argument. Pendennis opened lines of inquiry like a surgeon opening veins. Our lab experiments in the 72-inch liquid hydrogen bubble chamber gave us plenty to disagree about; I was using the university's high-

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speed digital computer to program the results. Facility with the IBM 709 had been one of the prerequisites for my position.

It was in the computer room one bright spring afternoon that I first realized Pendennis was an ultimates-seeker. To me life has always seemed a chemical accident, man an evolutionary sport, and phylum Annelida the end of it all; since I have maintained an implicit intellectual contempt for anyone who thinks otherwise, I was disconcerted to find a touch of that contempt in Pendennis.

He came in and perched on a corner of the worktable so that his big fleshy buns cushioned under his weight and stretched taut the design of his perennial tweed. When I looked up he leaned over and said, straight-faced, "Tom, do you believe in God?"

I stared at him popeyed. "What the devil does that to do with three-pion particle resonances?"

"Everything." He nodded his head several times like a courting grouse. "Scientific minds in the past have had to stop with the simplest element, hydrogen— molecular structure one proton, one electron —in trying to refute religionists who advocate a First Cause. But now we can destroy neutrons, break them down into protons and electrons through high-energy particle collisions, and build new atoms."

"We haven't done that in *this* shop," I pointed out. "Hell, we aren't here to prove or disprove a teleological cause for the universe, Pendennis. We two have a chance to do in physics what's never been done before. We can beat Alvarez or Fermi—but *not* if you're going to worry about ultimates."

A surprised look enlarged his face.

"Of course we'll beat them, Tom. But by going further than any physicist before us, we're going to show there's no pink frosting on the cake of creation. Our work will demonstrate that from a collision—an inevitable collision—of opposing forces of energy came the first cosmic matter. Then, once most of the earth's free hydrogen escaped from the atmosphere, methane, ammonia, and water eventually began producing the adenine necessary for life. After that came the eons of evolutionary experiment and systematization which religionists call Natural Law."

The man amazed me: an ultimates-seeker. His search for a scientifically explainable universe equated with the Christian existentialist's search for God, or the latent hysteric's hope that psychiatry is the key to his emotional instability. With his debauched poet's face and Wolfean physique, Pendennis shuffled in his toed-out sloth's shuffle after his ideal universe: a clean well-lighted place with only sphere music (pure energy) flowing through in directly measureable

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waves like light corpuscles through an oscilloscope.

With my fair skin, flaxen hair, and narrow fox face, wearing my T-shirt and fatigues with a crazy elegance, I tried with delicate hands like Eliot's scuttling claws to fend off *my* universe: a disordered place of chance beginnings where only the ingrained habits of evolution prevented women from giving birth to calves' heads; a universe with no meaning outside the individual lives, in micro-seconds, of its subatomic particles.

During the summer months we charted for the first time in history the energy distribution of a negative K meson and a proton by adapting the Halitz graph to show two relatively strong peaks in the plot of the negative pion and a single stronger peak in that of the positive pion. Since this distribution is consistent with the reaction producing two rather than three particles ($\overline{K}^- + \rho^+ \rightarrow \Upsilon^* + \pi$), and the strongest peak showed an average lifetime for Υ^* of 10^{-23} (a hundred-thousandth of a billion-billionth second), the publication of our conclusions created quite a stir.

All this, of course, was before the storm and even before Pendennis' natal day, when I gave him the ouija board as a joke.

The week after *Scientific American* carried a summation of our findings, Pendennis invited me over for a birthday bottle of Rémy Martin VSOP cognac. Turning toward his place through the undergraduates lacing the narrow street, I spotted a little hobby shop still open. It was one of those places that smell of model airplane dope and varnish; I was just deciding on a model kit of H.M.S. *Beagle,* the brigantine on which Darwin collected data for *Origin of Species* in 1831, when I spotted the ouija board and bought that instead.

"Sorry I couldn't get it wrapped properly."

"What is it?" His homely face was wreathed in smiles as he ripped off the brown paper wrapping. He was as excited as a kid at Christmas.

"Ouija board. The name comes from the French 'yes' and the German 'yes' combined—oui—ja. If you're attuned to the great beyond it spells things out for you."

He was touchingly delighted. "Does it work?"

"Not for a cynical scientist like me, but some people who ought to know better swear this thingamajig here—the counter—moves of its own volition across the board and spells out answers to questions."

"I'll be damned. What sort of things do you ask it?"

"Hell, I don't know. Is there a God?"

As kids we had always asked how old our mothers were or what our girl friends' names were, but Pendennis took me seriously. "Great! We can try to have a chat with the Old Gentleman!"

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All we got was an aimless circling by the counter, but by midnight each abortive attempt left us squeaking like mice—*in vino hilaritas*. So I suggested to Pendennis, "Ask for results on this tau-meson decay study we're starting."

He did, fingers lightly grasping the counter; a big blindfolded untidy man with his belly over his pants and sweat soaking through his shirt. I often wondered if he didn't seek neatness in his physical universe because he had none in his physical self—only gross flesh wrapped around an amazing brain. As I was putting *Night on Bald Mountain* on the hi-fi he yelled from across the room.

"Tom, the damn thing just shot across the board in a straight line!"

I looked: the counter rested firmly on *I*. As I was telling him about it, the counter sidled over to *N*. *IN*. In what?

"Indium: In," I suggested. "Atomic number forty-nine. Atomic weight 114.76. Density 7.28."

Pendennis was giggling under his blindfold. "Inconsistent systems of linear algebraic equations."

"Infundubulum."

"Wait a minute!" he cried, "There it goes again!"

"Head it off at the pass!" But it had already stopped on *S*.

"INS. Insecta? That's it. A class of the phylum Arthropoda, the largest taxonomic division of the animal kingdom, 450,000 species."

"Actually it's spelling instant coffee," I said. "A hint that—"

"International News Service. Due to my fame as a conceptual physicist, *INS* will make Pendennis a household—hey, it's moving again!"

A. Then *N*. Then a six-minute wait so that we almost decided it had stalled on *INSAN;* but then in rapid succession came *I, T,* and *Y*.

"Here it is, hot off the presses," I said. "*INSANITY*."

"In a way it makes sense, Tom." He was removing his blindfold. "Very straightforward: if we continue our work we'll go buggo."

"Maybe you already have. You can't seriously believe—"

"It spelled out a word," he said, cognac-stubborn.

"*You* spelled out the word. Your subconscious, working from memory of the letter placement on the board, moved your hands and the counter under them to various letters."

"You accept that as the explanation of a ouija board?"

"I do."

"Not me. Not yet." He leaned back, crossed his legs, jammed his foul dead pipe between his teeth, and stared at the board. "I wonder . . ."

Once, from an interest in the history of mathematics, I was led into Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*. I've forgotten all I can, but one thing stuck: he said that when you start looking for God you have already found

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Him. Pendennis was looking for a rational explanation of the universe that would dispense with God—which meant he really thought he would find one. The trouble with that is that an intelligent and honest man invariably ends up at the inexplicable. Has to. Always will.

He began showing up with studies in clinical psychology—the subconscious mind, of course—and soon was keeping Freud's *Interpretations of Dreams* on his desk. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was often propped up against the toaster for ingestion with his morning eggs, and the bookshelves in the living room, sprawling and untidy as Pendennis himself, began bristling with Adler, Brill, Bergson, and Krafft-Ebing. On the bottom sheld was something called simply *Dianetics*.

Even in California you get a feeling of fall in the air. A few leaves change, the evenings get crisper, and on the quiet streets of a university town, fresh-fallen walnuts crunch underfoot or plunk off the tops of parked cars. There was a change in Pendennis, too.

"Congratulations, Pendennis! For a whole week you haven't mentioned the id, your psychoses, or my sex drive as the reason I had two pieces of chocolate cake at lunch."

"It's that damned ouija board, Tom—I had to find out if the subconscious mind works it. After studying the data I accept that, but —" He nodded and snapped his fingers. "There are so damned many people who *wouldn't* accept it, who still would claim it was some supernatural agency."

"Nothing you can do about that. It's irrational, a perversion of common sense by religious sense."

He grunted. "I've got nothing against religion, but it's so blasted self-perpetuating. If science could once clear away all the nonsense about good and evil, God and the devil, man could transform his own destiny—merely by relying on himself alone."

"Nothing much you can do about it," I repeated.

He stared at me piercingly, then suddenly grinned all over his fat face and heaved himself from his easy chair. "I've been waiting to spring this on you. C'mon in the bedroom—I think you'll be interested."

In the bedroom there was a strong smell of astringent soap coupled with a faint odor of incense. All the furniture had been removed and two concentric circles—the outer one with a diameter of about nine feet and the inner one with about seven—had been painted on the bare hardwood floor. In the space between were some strange letters.

"Hebrew alphabet," he explained airily.

"Pendennis, have you gone absolutely fruitcake? What the—"

"And the square inside the inner circle—see? Very important. The

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upper point has to face directly east so the cross inside will point the right way. And the Star of David that I've superimposed—"

"I need a drink," I cut in hollowly. With a glass in one hand I waggled my free fingers at him. "Okay, give. What the hell is it?"

"A Sacred Pentacle." He said it with a straight face.

"To call up the devil?"

He ignored the sarcasm in my voice. "No, this one's to cast spells and curses."

"And you're saying that Satan will come and—"

He shook his head vehemently. "If you're after Satan himself, draw a circle around your triangle and hold a hazel wand cut with a new knife at sunrise from a tree which has never borne fruit."

"Well, I'll be damned. Pendennis, there are only two possibilities—either this is some elaborate leg pull or you actually have wigged out. If it isn't a joke—"

"It's no joke."

"Then you're serious. Then—"

"But when I say I've been doing this seriously for the past two weeks I'm not saying I expect—or ever did expect—anything to come of it." He leaned forward to pour himself another cognac, leaned back, waved an arm, and said, "Ultimates."

"You dignify that cheap hocus-pocus in there as an ultimate?"

He stoked up his pipe and gestured through the smoke. "Tom, it all ties in: energy as the origin of the universe, the subconscious mind in relation to the ouija board, that pentacle in the next room. We're both agreed that man would be a hell of a lot better off if he had never invented God in the first place, right?"

"Right."

"Okay. Then give me a scientifically acceptable proof that there is no God." When I just sat there looking at him, he waved his pipe triumphantly. "See? They *start out* with something not susceptible to proof. They don't even have to be logical." He tapped me on the knee with his pipestem. "Now: give me your impressions of the devil."

"You mean Satan?"

"Any name you want: Lucifer, Beelzebub, Astoreth."

I thought for a while. "First, he doesn't exist. Second, if he did, he would be an Edwardian gentleman with a gold-tipped cane and a bit of goatee, lighting thin cheroots without the aid of matches."

"That's interesting." He nodded several times. "My own idea is that Satan was the first scientist. Look at the sin for which he was banished—an intellectual one. He tempts Adam and Eve not with licentiousness but with knowledge. Churches call him Prince of Earth—the physical universe. I take him as a proto-Faust, an inquirer. Now, how does Christianity take him?"

"As a force of evil. The powers of darkness—"

"As an *individual.*" He grinned,

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squirrel-cheeked. "In the past the pentacle has been accepted as *the* way to summon Satan—see *The Key of Solomon, The Book of Enoch,* or *The Great Grimoire of Honorius III.* In *The New Testament* we have herds of possessed swine running over a cliff, and Satan appearing *in person* to tempt Christ in Matthew Four and transform himself into an angel of light in Two Corinthians. Consider the Inquisition: expression of a deadly serious belief in demonic possession of the person."

"Wait a minute!" I burst out. "I see where you're heading, but Christianity can claim they've been speaking of the devil *symbolically*—the old Scholastic line that evil is merely a good gone wrong."

He shook his head vigorously, so that his belly and the bulbs of his loose pectorals bounced under his white shirt.

"They can't. Augustine and Aquinas both posit his existence as an individual, *not* as a disembodied force; and today the Catholic mass ends with the words '. . . by the divine power thrust into hell Satan and the other evil spirits who wander through the world seeking the ruin of souls.' No, Tom, they can't back out."

"But *two weeks* of mumbling incantations, Pendennis!"

He heaved himself from the sagging easy chair whose springs had long since surrendered to his weight, and brought back from the bookcase a flat manila folder. He parked his broad buns once more.

"The only way to prove they didn't work. But that isn't enough. Take a look at these—can you program them for the 709 computer?"

Inside the folder, on several sheets of onion skin in Pendennis' neat copperplate, were a complex series of mathematical symbols. When I finally nodded he began to beam.

"What you have there is a virtually complete abstract of every known spell and incantation to summon Satan, all reduced to mathematical formulas. Now all we have to do is program the symbols for the digital computer, thereby reducing the factor of human error to zero, and if my symbols are correct and your program logical, Satan *must* appear."

"And if no goateed gent after an eternal lease on our souls shows up, you believe that will prove he doesn't exist."

"That's what I believe. Scientifically demonstrating that there is no personal entity devoting itself to evil may not disprove the existence of its counterfoil, a personal God devoted to good—but it sure will raise questions."

That's when I started to laugh. Staring into Pendennis' sweat-stippled face and listening to his solemn tones, considering he was one of the world's most brilliant physicists, made not laughing impossible. I stuck out my hand, still choking. "I'm your boy, Pendennis."

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We decided that to the Edwardian-gentleman proto-Faust we had conceived, the computer room itself would be acceptable. No belladonna, no heavy drapes, no musk or black masses necessary. I wanted to finish the program by Halloween, however.

"A ritualistic bow to the past," I explained to Pendennis. "This ought to be what a midnight walk through a graveyard is to a kid."

"How do you mean?"

"We know nothing will happen but we should still manage to scare the hell out of ourselves at least once on the way through. Oh, can you line up an oscilloscope for tomorrow night?"

"Sure, but what are you going to use it for?"

I took him over to the 709's central computing unit, a squat gray metal box, waist-high, with all the switches and rows of lights usually lampooned in cartoons and featured in science-fiction films.

"A program, Pendennis, is merely a logical arrangement of instructions to the machine. You already had the incantations reduced to symbols; I transferred them to a set of key-punch cards, then cut instructions on another set of cards and assembled them into a self-loading program. Tomorrow night I will run your symbolic representations of the incantations through central computing to core storage, that big metal box over there—a sort of super filing system with storage 'locations' from 00001 to 77777."

"Like a filing cabinet with seventy-seven thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven drawers?"

"Close enough. Once I've loaded —stored—each incantation at a separate location in core storage, I will then load the program itself—the logical set of instructions to the machine—into this third box off to the left that's known as the card reader. The program will order the computer to follow instructions sequentially."

He waved an impatient fleshy hand. "But the oscilloscope—"

"Patience, Pendennis. Once the incantations are at the proper locations in core storage and the instructions—the program—are in the card reader, I push the *logical start button*. This tells the computer: *go to 'begin' of instructions and START PROCESSING.* Instruction A of the program tells central computing to get the first incantation from its location in core storage. When it does, I want the 'shape' of that incantation flashed through the oscilloscope. We can sit here in the dark—more spooky that way—and watch the pattern of light corpuscles on the screen just as if we were watching a test pattern on a television screen."

"Why is that necessary?"

"How can a man with a supposedly brilliant mind be so obtuse? Getting the incantation from its location and putting it into the oper-

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ating register corresponds to chanting and waving your wand in your pentacle. By flashing it on the oscilloscope screen—"

He was nodding. "Sure. We have to have an actual release of energy to give Satan something physical through which to materialize."

"Right. Once the incantation at the first location has been used, the machine automatically goes on to instruction B."

"Which is?"

"To go to 00666 in core storage, designated as *LOCATION DEVIL*."

"666—the Mark of the Beast in *Revelations*. Satan will be there?"

"If the incantation has worked. If there is no change at 00666, the machine passes to instruction C, which orders it to 00333, *LOCATION NO-DEVIL*—a standing instruction for the on-line printer, this fourth box over here, to print *YOUR NUMBER DOES NOT ANSWER*. After that the machine goes to instruction D, an order to begin the whole process again for the second incantation. After we've used them all, the computer goes to the terminal location and receives an order for the on-line printer: *I DO NOT EXIST*. Then the machine shuts itself off."

"What if there should actually be some change at *LOCATION DEVIL*?"

"Then the on-line printer will give us *HERE I AM*. One other thing. Because new programs often have 'bugs' in them—minor illogicities which in this case might conceivably make the computer print *HERE I AM* even though Satan isn't at *LOCATION DEVIL*—I've built the program so that the machine will go to *LOCATION MATERIALIZE* any time it prints *HERE I AM*. This orders it back to *LOCATION DEVIL* once more to flash the pattern of anything which might be there to the oscilloscope. Then, assuming nothing is there, it goes back into sequence."

When I was halfway down the walk the first spears of rain began lancing down, so I went back for my poncho. By the time I had crossed the campus to the Physical Sciences Building it was a real Halloween night—howling wind and rain lashing my legs. And as I used my key on the side entrance, lightning flashed vividly down the inky night and thunder pulsed and roared in a far corner of the sky.

Light spilled across the third-floor corridor from the computer-room door; inside Pendennis was perched shapelessly over his favorite corner of the worktable, all tweeds and tobacco and wet-wool smell.

"The small craft warnings will be up on the coast," he said over the rim of his cognac glass. "Gale force winds, by the radio."

"I didn't seen any hobgoblin outfits on the way over."

"And won't. Too wet. Too late,

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too—after eleven." He stopped as lightning seared the windows; the crunch of thunder punctuated his braying donkey laugh. "Too late for real hobgoblins, too, Tom. Mankind's impressionable youth has mellowed into cynical middle age. I drink to the passing of the Age of Belief."

While warming up the machine and storing the incantations I downed a stiff cognac. "At least the weather is cooperating even if Satan won't. Pendennis, it's a night for hell to breathe contagions."

He grinned. "Thomas—" He raised his glass as lightning flickered the windows, and thunder boomed. "— to failure."

"To failure."

At one minute to midnight the program cards were in the reader and Pendennis walked over to the light switch. I put my finger in the start button of the 709. Only the shush of rain marred the silence.

"Thirty seconds," said Pendennis.

Half a dozen televised Canaveral launchings flashed through my mind. "No countdowns, please," I said.

"Fifteen seconds. When the lights go out, you're on."

"Speak of the devil," I said.

Darkness. Start button. Cards flipping through the reader. In the rain-spattered silence the oscilloscope screen glowed greenly. Light green patterns, the first incantation, wriggled across it as Pendennis groped his way back to his seat. By the glow I picked out the words of the on-line printer's first clacked message.

"*YOUR NUMBER DOES NOT ANSWER*," I read.

"It made a damned pretty pattern. Scratch Number One."

"And Number Two." The printer was repeating the message.

I knew then—had known all along but had subconsciously ignored it—that nothing was going to happen. In a way I felt cheated. I said, "Same for Number Three. Some set of incantations *you* picked, Pendennis."

"Best on the market, my boy," he said cheerfully.

After all, he was being proved right.

"Same for—hey, what the—?"

The printer had blurted *HERE I AM*.

I grunted gloomily as the printer belched *MATERIALIZE*.

"I must have programmed a bug into it. I'll turn on the lights and —"

"This pattern's gone crazy!" exclaimed Pendennis.

"That'll teach us," I said, fumbling my way to the door. "I'll probably have to spend two days getting the machine cleared."

But as my fingers touched the light switch the darkness was split by a sudden tremendous sheet of fire, a searing flash across my eyes. The entire building seemed to rise, turn, buckle, the floor seemed to

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heave like the surface of the sea when tsunami shock waves pass through it. Thunder roared—gigantic, shocking, unutterable.

Then dead silence. Blackness.

Pendennis said in a desperately normal voice, "This building must have been struck by lightning."

I felt a strange tingling relief. "For a second I thought—"

"This building—" he began again; then glass shattered, and there was a tremendous roaring, a sensation of horrible goat-stench, a scorching corposant white-hot-black whizzing, a furnace-blast stink in my face—and a hairy shoulder sent me sprawling. *Hairy?*

"—been struck—"

In whirling blackness his futile litany of rationality was more grotesque than the inner-glowing shape, fireball, thing, already gone; the fluorescents began to glow weakly.

"—lightning—" His terminal word hung lifeless.

Scrambling to my feet I found the floor unbuckled and no windows smashed: but the oscilloscope screen was sharded to dust across the floor.

Pendennis was standing in front if the gray, settled mound of metal where the 709 had—

The 709.

—melted.

Running glowing goatlike . . . Pendennis had been directly in front of the oscilloscope. He had seen it.

"Pendennis—"

Pendennis was maintaining silence. Doubting Thomas—I worked hard at it. A freak lightning had shorted the electricity, melting the computer. Pendennis, a salt image, was now trembling.

He had seen it.

Damn it, no! Lightning! Reek of a billion matches. No! Lightning. It must have been!

I pounded my clenched fist on the worktable until the knuckle of the little finger was mashed flat and bloody. Edwardian gentleman? Proto-Faust? The Shaggy One—Greek goat-god Dionysos, Egyptian death-god Set. Goat-stink, brimstone-stink . . .

Lightning?

Then why the clots of tumbled steaming dung on the floor?

I must sweep it out—like manure from horse's stable. I must. Impossible to explain. I must forget. But what if I *had* seen the face—as Pendennis had . . .

No! I must not accept. Must clean up. Must . . .

Tracks.

I saw the tracks, shoulder-level, all the way around the room, still faintly smoking. I reached out. On the walls? *In* the walls? Black three-toed clawmarks burned into the restfully green plaster. Ten feet between tracks.

No! Must not accept. Freak of Natural Law.

I led Pendennis like a trained Himalaya bear down to the chem

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lab on the second floor and perched him on a stool, baby-obedient—doughy flesh, with no yeast of spirit to work within. Fire with fire. Must get thermite. White-hot burning, stark intensity of flashbulb, all-consuming, all-melting, like lightning, like Satan, like metal, like a 709 computer. Scorching out three-toes antediluvian tracks. If no one else saw, would I have to accept?

No. Must not accept. *Time*. I saw my life avidly lapping up seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, *lifetime*—one lifetime to be traversed, tightrope over the abyss, burdened with that knowledge—no, I must not accept—to . . . to what? White hairs to a quiet grave? Or misshapen cloven-footed thing?

Leaving Pendennis in the chem lab, I started back upstairs with the thermite, precious as philosopher's stone, bent on necessary fire. I knew inexorable time and I feared it, more than most men; it was rushing me toward that final wall beyond which might lie—Eternity.

And knowing that, I wondered if perhaps Pendennis, in his quiet insane retreat to that inner vacuum where no voice sounds and no time flows—if Pendennis were not the luckier of us after all.

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the *NEWEST* police procedural story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Nobody at headquarters ever heard of Mitch Taylor taking on a job that wasn't shoved at him; yet here he was almost begging for it. And the truth was, Mitch wouldn't have got himself involved if it weren't for the couch fabric his wife wanted, and of course the French cheese with the grape seeds on the outside . . . a straightforward police procedural investigation—no frills, no furbelows, no fancy stuff, yet meaty and absorbing and with the smack of it-really-could-have-happened . . .

A AS IN ACCIDENT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

WHAT HAPPENED WAS, THE Commissioner wanted all this paper work done, and Mitch Taylor got elected. Then, while he was doing desk stuff, Charlie Small somehow wangled Car Number Four, which was Mitch's, and on account of the shortage after that crack-up last week, Charlie hung onto the car. And how Mitch was going to get to that fabric place 'way out on Bierce Street and pick up the junk Amy had ordered for the new couch was a tough one.

She could have had it delivered, of course, but what she was really after was for Mitch to stop in at the fancy cheese place nearby and get her some Thon de Savoie, with the grape seeds on the outside. She pronounced the name real Frenchy, but Mitch just called it Tom Savvy and this Al something-or-other who worked there always got a laugh out of it. Naturally he and Mitch got to know each other and they always kidded around a little.

So Mitch had this problem, and he was thinking about it when he went into the washroom around eleven that morning. The guy in there was a nice-looking kid wearing glasses; he was in his twenties and about Mitch's build only without the heft, and he looked sick. Mitch figured somebody'd maybe slapped the kid around a little, which was no skin off Mitch's back. He went about his business and then sloshed water on his puss and combed down that stiff wiry hair of his. He looked his usual

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cocky self—nothing to burn up Hollywood, but nothing to be ashamed of, either.

When the door opened, Mitch turned around and watched big Joe Thompson, of the Motor Vehicles Squad, come in. He said, "Hi, Mitch," then gave this kid a hard look and said, "You still here?"

The kid looked sore, but he didn't answer. Joe, spoiling for an argument, said, "I told you to beat it, didn't I?"

That brought the kid up on his hind legs. "I'm not taking orders from you," he said. "You know damn well I told you the truth, but maybe you have private reasons for not believing me."

Joe walked up to the kid and towered over him. "Better apologize for that crack. You want to take it back, don't you?"

"Maybe you just don't want to bother," the guy said, steadily enough. "Is it too far for you to go, just out to Bierce?"

Joe didn't push it. He grunted, turned to Mitch, and said, "Hear him? He wants somebody to go out to Bierce and check this phony story of his. Feel like wasting your time on it?"

"Why not?" Mitch said promptly. "Got a car for me, Joe?"

Joe looked surprised, like Mitch had bit off the corner of his ear or something; but after a second or two he let out a roar of laughter. "Take Matson's," Joe said, indicating the kid. "He can't drive it, anyhow. No license. Not after that accident of his."

The Matson kid looked hopeful, but Joe kept riding him. "Sure," Joe said to him. "Tell him, wingding. Tell him what happened. Maybe *he'll* swallow it."

"Look," Mitch said to Thompson. "If you want me to investigate, I got to check this out with the Lieutenant. Okay?"

Thompson yawned. "Sure," he said. "Go ahead."

So Mitch headed for the Lieutenant's office, with Matson tailing along. Mitch sat him down in the anteroom and went into Lieutenant Decker's cubicle. The Lieutenant was having some kind of conference with the small stuffed crocodile on his bookcase, but he called it off while he listened to Mitch.

When Mitch had finished, Decker gave him a searching glance. "How come Joe's turning this over to you?"

Mitch shrugged. "It just happened, sort of."

"It couldn't be that this is your way of getting hold of a car, could it?"

"Well, I'll need one," Mitch admitted, "but what I'm really doing is a personal favor for Joe. Seems he's too busy to follow through on this."

"On what?" Decker said.

"Some kind of accident, but I haven't got the details yet."

"Well, bring the guy in."

Mitch opened the door and mo-

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tioned to Matson, who walked into the office and sat down. Charles Matson of Harte Terrace, which was a real swank neighborhood. He told his story straight and with a kind of desperate sincerity, like he had to make them believe.

"Remember that storm last Saturday?" he said. "The rain came down in buckets, you could hardly see, and I wasn't going more than ten miles an hour."

They never were, Mitch thought, and he wondered what he was getting himself into. Still, if the guy was just trying to worm out of a bad hole, the Lieutenant would catch on fast and tell Mitch to lay off.

"What time was this?" Decker asked.

"About one in the morning," Matson answered. "I have a good car, I keep it in good condition, and I drive carefully. I saw that the traffic light at Bierce and Post was red, and I slowed down to about five miles an hour so I wouldn't have to use my brakes. Then the light turned green and I kept on going, until suddenly I saw this car in front of me. Stuck there right in the middle of the street. No lights. And in that rain there was no way of seeing it until I was practically on top of it."

"You banged into it?" Decker said.

"No. I have good brakes, they worked, and I hardly skidded. I touched so gently I wasn't even jolted. I backed up a few feet, and suddenly the car switched on its lights and shot backwards and rammed smack into me. I guess he got mixed up. He ripped his fender but only gave me a bumper dent. Then I saw it was a taxi, but I was too surprised to do anything. I just sat there, trying to make some sense out of what had happened. After about half a minute this taxi driver got out and came up to me and accused me of driving recklessly and banging into his car and trying to jump a light. I was so completely flabbergasted I didn't know what to do."

"What *did* you do?" Decker asked.

"I got out and exchanged licenses with him. In the rain, with everything getting soaked and my glasses all wet, I could hardly see. Besides, I was upset. And then suddenly an ambulance came up—the taxi driver must have phoned for it right after he rammed me, he had a two-way radio phone—and he and the intern took a girl out of the back seat and put her on a stretcher. I couldn't see her, and I didn't even know there was a passenger until the ambulance came. It was all so sudden. The ambulance, the passenger, and in a few seconds they were gone. Everything was blurry and rushed, because of the rain.

"No police?" Decker asked.

"Yes, but they got there after the

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ambulance left. The taxi driver kept telling them it was my fault, that I'd been driving too fast and hadn't stopped for the traffic light. I tried to argue with him. And then—I hadn't seen him before, I don't know where he came from—but a newspaper dealer walked over, with one of those *Evening Chronicle* aprons on, that's how I knew—this newsdealer came over and told the police he'd seen the whole thing and it was exactly the way the taxi driver said."

"Was that the extent of the investigation?"

"Yes. Then they drove off, and I thought that would be the end of it. A minor insurance claim, with nothing to worry about. But the next day the police came and told me the passenger had been killed and it was my fault. It wasn't. I swear it."

"Where were you coming from at one in the morning?"

"I'd seen a girl," Matson said sheepishly.

"Been drinking?"

"Oh, no. I hardly ever do, and I'm glad of it, because I'm in trouble enough. My license has been suspended and I'm being charged with vehicular homicide. But I couldn't have killed her—it's impossible!"

Decker frowned. "Boss," Mitch said in his high, tenor voice, "this sounds like a Chicago racket I heard about. Up there they pull it late at night when the pavement's nice and icy. Park in the middle of the street and let somebody skid into you. Wilson and his boys broke it up. Some dame, they called her Hospital Hannah—she could fake all kinds of stuff, back trouble, dizzy spells, she even made her own bruises—anyhow, she'd be the passenger and they'd set it up pretty much the way Matson here told it, and then collect on the insurance. Only difference is, she never killed herself."

"Let's get hold of that accident report, first," Decker said. He lifted the phone and made his request.

You could tell he was burned up over the way the police had muffed the accident investigation, but he didn't let on to a civilian. He was probably thinking of what he'd do to those cops, while he tapped his fingers on the desk and waited for the accident report. When it came, he glanced through it.

"Looks okay," he said. "Nothing in here about a witness, though. A taxi driver named George Coburn says his car stalled at Bierce and Post, and a car driven by Charles Matson ran into him. Coburn's passenger said she was hurt, so he called an ambulance and they took her away. That's all." He handed the sheet to Mitch. "No wonder the M.V. Squad picked up his license."

"But I *couldn't* have killed her," Matson said. "I couldn't!"

"Would you recognize this witness?" Decker asked.

"I don't think so. In the rain,

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with my glasses streaming, I could hardly see."

The Lieutenant spoke to Mitch. "Look into it," Decker said. "Get hold of this newsdealer, while I take care of Coburn. And don't forget your SA-4, first."

"Sure," Mitch said. SA-4—that was the Supplementary Aid request that the Homicide Squad needed on a case that had started somewhere else. Without it, Mitch would be wide open for messing around in the M.V. Squad's business.

Joe Thompson stuck his monicker and badge number down on the form and seemed glad to get out from under. He gave Mitch a funny look, because this was the first time anybody had ever heard of Mitch Taylor taking on a load that wasn't shoved at him. Still, it was off Joe's back, and if he'd pulled a boner, he was covered now; he'd called in the Homicide Squad.

Outside, Mitch looked at the bumper dent on Matson's big white convertible. The dent didn't look like much, just a little yellow paint scraped onto it; but you never could tell.

"You see?" Matson kept saying. "You can hardly notice it. How could I have killed anybody with a little bump like that?"

"That's what I want to find out," Mitch said, and got behind the wheel.

He drove this dreamboat out to Bierce and then remarked casually that he had a little errand to do—something his wife wanted him to pick up at a fabric place. After that, Mitch went over to the cheese joint and got some Tom Savvy. Al pulled his usual crack about savvy good cheese, and Mitch said how his wife had a yen for it, and then Mitch asked if Al knew anything about that accident the other night.

"I heard something about it," Al said. "They say somebody smashed up a taxi."

"Who's this guy sells papers on the corner?" Mitch asked.

"What guy?" Al said. "Nobody's there and nobody ever has been. Take a look. The only place you can buy papers is the corner stationery, and they close up every night at eight."

"Yeah," Mitch said, without surprise.

He took the cheese with him, checked the corner again, and decided nobody in his right mind would be selling papers there at 1:00 a.m., even if he had a regular stand. Then Mitch went over to the hospital. After a little trouble he located the intern who'd been riding the ambulance.

He was a small nervous guy and he was anxious to get out of it; but after a lecture from Mitch on the importance of cooperating with the police, the guy admitted that he hadn't examined the girl at the scene. He'd thought she'd fainted, but his chief interest had been getting out of the rain as fast as he

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could, and then drying off. Maybe she'd been dead when he'd helped haul her out of the cab. Maybe. He didn't really know.

But if he'd been sloppy, so had the rest of the hospital staff. The girl that the ambulance had brought in was dead on arrival. Broken neck, and a head bruise. No autopsy. According to an identification card in her purse, her name was Estelle Rinehart, her telephone number was 359-6010, and they'd called there and her husband had answered.

He'd come straight up, identified her, and made arrangements for the body, which was sent over to the Bates Funeral Parlor. The hospital had had one of those bad nights—three emergencies with a few of the staff out of town. The death certificate had been signed without anyone half looking at it, and with all the usual procedures kind of short-circuited. They'd been glad to get rid of the body.

Mitch didn't push it. He was after facts, and he was getting them. So, with Matson still tagging along, Mitch went to the Bates place and found out that the body had already been cremated, and the husband had paid and gone off with the ashes. That's the way the Bates outfit liked to do business. Cash on the barrel head, and no fuss or feathers.

After that Mitch stopped off at his apartment and left the cheese and the couch fabric for Amy, and then he delivered Matson at his house and left the car in Matson's garage. Back at headquarters, Mitch found out that the Rinehart phone number, 359-6010, was a pay booth on Longden Boulevard, in the 5000 block.

With that much under his hat Mitch stared at the wall for a little while, because if he saw the Lieutenant too soon, Mitch might get an assignment that would keep him working for another hour or two. But by cleaning his nails and taking a trip to the washroom and stopping in to see Jub Freeman up in the lab, Mitch's timing worked out pretty good. It was around a quarter of five when he went in to see Decker to bring him up to date.

"Brother!" the Lieutenant said. "Somebody really pulled a fast one! Sticks an identification card with a fake name and a public phone number in this dame's purse and arranges an 'accident.' When the hospital calls the number to say she's dead, this bozo answers and pretends to be her husband. He rushes over to the hospital, gets the body, and processes it through the nearest crematorium. All nice and legal."

"Seen that cab driver yet?" Mitch asked.

"Coburn?" Decker said. "No. He hasn't been home all day, but he's due to start work at eight. I'm having him picked up at the garage and brought over here. I figure we'll have a nice long talk."

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Good enough, Mitch told himself, and anything else could wait till tomorrow. So Mitch went home at five, had a good dinner, watched TV, slept fine, had no dreams, and why should he? He'd got Amy the cheese and the upholstery stuff and he'd slid out of that paper work; whatever worries there were, the Lieutenant could have them.

The big news next morning, so far as Mitch was concerned, was that the police garage had all the cars running, but they gave Mitch the one that had been in the smash-up. He figured he'd go along with it for a while—it was just a matter of time before he'd get Number Four back again. He could switch with whoever had it, which turned out to be Bankhart.

The Lieutenant started off by briefing the gang on the dope that Mitch had dug up yesterday, and then Decker said how he'd seen Coburn. The cab driver claimed he'd picked up his fare in front of a downtown movie and she told him to take Bierce as far as Whittaker and then go north and she'd show him the house to stop at. Due to the rain, the cab had stalled at the traffic light, and then Matson had rammed into it, hard. After they'd disengaged, Coburn had backed up by mistake, but had hit with only a slight click.

So there were the two accounts —take your pick, and how could you tell which one was telling the truth?

As for the witness, Coburn said he didn't know the guy's name and why should he? Coburn didn't want to bring charges—he just wanted to forget the whole thing —which Decker wasn't going to let him do, at least not until Decker was sure the accident hadn't been staged and the witness planted. So the first order of business was to watch Coburn and find out what he did and whom he saw, and the Lieutenant picked Bankhart and Charlie Small for the job.

Then Decker came up with his bombshell. If there was no Estelle Rinehart, then who got killed?

From the way the Lieutenant went on after that, he must have been up most of the night. He'd gotten some descriptions from the hospital of what this dame looked like and he'd checked with current descriptions of missing persons and he'd made a fix on one Beegee Owens, missing since Sunday.

What they knew about her was, she hung around bars, particularly the Crescent, and was something of a tramp, which was why her husband had busted up with her. She came from Smithville, about ten miles out of the city, and she'd been living with a girl named Viola Parsons. Mitch got tagged with the assignment of back-tracking on this Beegee female—and where did she pick up a name like that?

He got to the address around eleven that morning. It was a cheap two-room apartment, and Viola

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Parsons opened the door. She was wearing dark glasses that you couldn't see through and a kind of housegown that you could, which was okay with Mitch.

After he'd identified himself, she said, "I thought I was through with the police. He said I wouldn't be bothered any more."

"Who said?"

"The officer who came for the letter."

"What letter?"

"The one she told me to give to the police if she didn't come home Saturday night. He came Sunday morning and asked for it, and I gave it to him. I did right, didn't I?",

"Did he show you his badge?"

"No, not like you did. But he *said* he was a policeman."

"Yeah," Mitch said, and didn't bother asking Viola if she'd wondered how the police had dreamed up about this letter. What it came down to probably was, Beegee had tried to shake somebody down and she'd written this letter about it to protect herself, only they'd been a little too smart for her. They'd killed her, put her body in the cab, set up the fake accident, and then come around for the letter, which she'd either told them about or else somebody had made a good guess.

So Mitch took Coburn's picture out of his pocket and showed it to Viola.

"Is this the guy you gave the letter to?" he asked.

She looked at the picture and shook her head. "No," she said.

Still, Mitch had a lead, so he stuck around and made friends with Viola. She offered him a cup of coffee and told him how Beegee had been broke and owed everybody, including Viola, but Beegee had expected to be in the dough in a big way. All of which fell into place with Mitch's theory, except he didn't know who had hired Coburn and how deep the cabbie was messed up in this.

Mitch got permission from Viola to look through Beegee's stuff and he found a bunch of visiting cards and a little book with a lot of names in it. Some of them had addresses and some of them didn't, and Mitch wondered how many of them were phony.

That was about all he could pick up here, so next thing he drove out to Smithville to see Beegee's parents, who were simple, country folk; they lived near a swamp where they raised mosquitoes. The mosquitoes didn't seem to bother them any, but they sure went for Mitch, so he cut his visit short.

About all he learned was, when Beegee got born they couldn't decide whether to call her Beatrice or Gertrude, so they just put B. G. down on the birth certificate and let it go at that. They didn't approve of her having gone to the city and they didn't know exactly what she did there, and it was too bad about her husband leaving her; he

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was a nice guy, they said, and the last time they'd seen her was a couple of months ago.

Mitch was glad to say goodbye to the mosquitoes and head back for town. He decided to stop in at the Crescent, where Beegee hung out. It had been raided a couple of times, but it was still operating.

Mitch turned the corner and spotted the Crescent sign, and then he saw Number Four parked at the curb with Bankhart sitting at the wheel. So Mitch stopped and walked over to find out what was what. Bank told him, Coburn was in the Crescent—he'd been there about fifteen minutes, and Bank didn't want to show himself. He and Mitch talked it over and decided it was okay for Mitch to go in and ask some questions about Beegee. Mitch would keep his eye open for Coburn, but otherwise wouldn't pay any attention to him.

There are two ways for a cop to tackle a joint like the Crescent. One is, if he isn't known, to try and make like a civilian—just amble in, not ask any questions, look around without seeming to, take a drink, get to talking with somebody, and then play it by ear. The other is to walk right up to the bar, show your badge, and ask your questions straight out, which was what Mitch did.

As far as the bartender went, Mitch got just about what he expected, which was a big nothing. Beegee? The bartender thought he'd heard the name, but he wasn't sure. He looked at her picture, and still wasn't sure. He didn't know when he'd seen her last, had no idea whom she went with, and would Mitch like a beer on the house?

Mitch said sure, and he drank it down without seeming to look around. But he saw the door to the back room where somebody had sneaked out right after Mitch had entered, and he had a pretty good idea that the door was now locked and would stay locked until he left.

And the other thing Mitch saw in the mirror was Coburn's head. Coburn was sitting in a booth with another guy who looked enough like him to be his brother—and could also be the guy who'd posed as a newsdealer and backed up Coburn's story of the accident.

Mitch played it dumb and let the bartender think he'd drawn a blank. When Mitch left, he looked like he'd struck out at the bottom of the ninth with the bases full. Down the block, he checked with Bank, then went back to headquarters, reported to the Lieutenant, and showed him Beegee's little book with all the names in it. And that was a full day's work in any language.

At the regular briefing the next morning, the Lieutenant was all wound up.

"This," he stated, "is one big goof from beginning to end, and so far somebody's making a monkey out

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of us. We have no *corpus delicti,* and we can't even prove there was a homicide. Everything points to it, but we haven't got one damn bit of evidence. A dame named Beegee Owens disappeared. Maybe she went off with some guy. Maybe she's in the Caribbean being a mermaid with some hot shot on an expense account. Maybe she got cremated under the name of Estelle Rinehart. Maybe, maybe! We don't know where Beegee is or who got cremated. All we know is, a cab driver named Coburn turned a passenger over to an ambulance and she was dead on arrival, with a broken neck and with an identification that dead-ended in a telephone booth."

Decker glared at the gang. The only other unsolved homicide they had was a bum found beaten up in an alley, and who he was and who'd done it, they didn't know and never would.

Mitch scratched his mosquito bites. "What about this guy that impersonated an officer?" he asked.

"Probably Ray Kolesky," the Lieutenant said, like he had a crystal ball that told him stuff nobody else knew. "He's Coburn's brother —Coburn changed his name but Ray didn't. He used to work with one of the Chicago mobs, but when it got broken up he came down here. He's a killer. This is the first time he's tried to pull anything in this town, and it's got to be the last. Chances are, he was the witness that disappeared."

"You want I should try to get the Parsons dame to identify him?" Mitch asked.

"Right. This fake accident sounds like a trick Kolesky learned in Chicago and brought here with him. Whether Beegee was his personal business or whether he was hired to take care of her, we don't know. But it's five to one he killed her and put the body in the cab. Get that identification so we can hold him. There are pictures of him coming up, along with Beegee's—they ought to be outside now."

The Lieutenant looked at his notes. "Bank, meet Taylor back here after he gets the Kolesky identification. You can sign the warrant, and then you and Taylor pick up Kolesky. I have a list of places where you might find him. Now the rest of you—we've got those names in Beegee's address book to cover—here are lists for all of you." He tapped the sheets to be handed out. "But go easy and remember this is an open investigation—no homicide on the books—so don't go off half cocked. If you think you're onto something, check with me. Any questions?"

Charlie Small wanted to know what the lab had come up with, which was just about nothing, and then got a laugh by asking if the Commissioner's name was on that list. With that the meeting broke up.

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Mitch still had car Number Eleven, but he figured when he and Bank went out together, they'd take Number Four and he'd talk Bank into letting Mitch keep it. Only Charlie Small beat him to it again, so that didn't work either.

Up at the Parson dame's place, he rang the bell and she let him in. She was wearing a heavy, quilted business, but he noticed a fancy, yellow thing spread out on a chair, and the box that it had come in was still there. It was labeled *Sherman,* which was a real high-class place; Amy told him once that you couldn't touch anything there for less than a couple of hundred bucks. And where Viola Parsons got that kind of dough, Mitch didn't know.

He showed her the mug shot of Kolesky and asked if this was the guy she'd given the letter to, and she said no. That kind of threw Mitch, and he had a feeling she might be lying. More to give himself time to think it over and figure out another approach, he asked her about the dress and she said it was Beegee's, that it had just come this morning. Beegee must have bought it last week, only there were some alterations, so it hadn't been delivered until now.

"And to think I can't wear it," Viola said with disgust. "I can't even get into it."

Mitch picked it up. "Okay if I take it along with me?" he said.

"Certainly not," she snapped.

He knew why all right—he could practically read her mind. She had ideas about returning it for cash, so he shrugged her off and said, "Police business." She made a grab for it and he had to shove her toward a chair. She went sprawling into it, and she was screeching and swearing at him when he beat it out and slammed the door behind him.

He took the dress over to Sherman's, where he showed his badge and asked for the manager. The manager looked like he was all dressed up for a wedding and was scared Mitch would queer it. He sneaked Mitch through a side door and into an office with a thick red carpet and a bunch of mirrors and some spindly chairs you were afraid they'd bust if you sat down on them. Mitch didn't sit, but he stuck the dress on one of the chair backs.

"This thing," he said. "It was delivered to a Mrs. B. G. Owens and the price tag says two hundred and fifty. Who paid for it?"

This fancy-pants guy examined the sales slip. "Is there something wrong with it?" he asked.

"The dress is okay. I just want to know who paid for it."

Fancy-pants pressed a button, mumbled into a phone, then said to Mitch, "It was a cash sale and Miss Janet made it. Possibly she can give you some information."

"She can," Mitch said firmly, "and she will."

Miss Janet was a tall thin-legged dame who smiled at Mitch like it

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was his birthday and she was going to recite a poem at him. She remembered the sale, on account Beegee was a little different from most of her customers, and she said Beegee had been here with a guy all right, and he'd paid.

Mitch got a description of him, and it knocked him for a loop. He wondered why he hadn't tumbled to it before.

Then, just to be sure, he said, "And when they left, they got into a big white convertible, huh?"

Miss Janet nodded. "Yes, how did you know?"

The rest was simple. Mitch stopped off at headquarters to get a picture of Matson, then went back to Viola. Mitch still had the dress, and she thought he was going to hand it over to her, so she didn't make any trouble. Sure, she said, Matson was the guy she'd given the letter to—yes, she was positive. Mitch thanked her, then had a kind of scuffle when he started off with the dress, but he won easy.

The way he figured it now was, Beegee had been going around with Matson. Maybe she was pregnant or something, so she put the bite on him. For more than he could stand, so he decided to get rid of her. Only he had to get rid of the body too, because an investigation of Beegee's death would lead right back to Matson's door.

Ten to one, Mitch figured, Matson hired Kolesky to kill her, which Kolesky did by breaking her neck. Then Kolesky had this smart idea of disposing of the body by putting it in his brother's cab, faking an accident, and ringing Matson in on it.

Everything fell right in Kolesky's lap. There was this storm and the half-baked investigation of the accident, then the intern who just wanted to get in out of the rain, and finally the goof-up at the hospital. So these three, Kolesky and Coburn and Matson, they all felt pretty safe about the murder.

The trouble started when Coburn got scared that a charge of vehicular homicide might cost him his hacking license. So he put the finger on Matson by claiming that some hot-rod kid had jumped a red light and smashed into his cab. Kolesky backed up his brother, and Matson was left holding the bag.

Matson wasn't about to take a double-cross like that—he didn't care who got squeezed, just so he got clear of the mess himself. He was sore enough to blab to Joe Thompson that the accident was a frame-up, and after that the real investigation got started.

Mitch knew he didn't have enough to make a murder rap stick. But that was the Lieutenant's headache. What Mitch had dug up would make him the bright boy of the Homicide Squad for today, and you played out your deal one card at a time.

He drove back to headquarters and parked in his usual slot in the

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courtyard. He had the dress hooked over his arm when he went through the swinging doors and into the complaint room, where the desk sergeant sat on his can and made wisecracks at you, except if a civilian happened to be around.

There were two of them waiting when Mitch came in. There was this guy and this doll, and she was the spitting image of Beegee, and she took one look at Mitch and exploded.

"That looks like my dress," she yelled. "How did you get it? And who are *you*?"

Mitch did a kind of double-take. "Who are *you*?" he asked.

"Mrs. Walter Owens," she answered, tilting up her nose. "And this is my husband, and I want my dress."

"You're Beegee Owens?" She nodded. "But you're supposed to be dead."

"Do I look it?" she demanded, very sarcastic-like.

It was getting a little complicated for Mitch, so he said, "Let's go in and see the Lieutenant, huh?"

It turned out Mitch had been on the button about most of it. Beegee tried to squirm out of the part about her attempted shakedown of Matson, but once the Lieutenant made her admit that, the rest was clear sailing.

"Matson agreed to pay me for—for certain things," she said. "He told me to go to the Crescent and collect, only he said he couldn't get there himself, he'd send someone else with the money. He told me to wear my brown checked suit, so they'd recognize me."

"And you figured it wasn't safe," Decker said, "so you sent a friend. Some little tramp who wouldn't be missed, in case they were going to play rough."

"I just wanted my friend to pave the way," Beegee said, trying to look innocent but not quite making it. "She wore my brown checked suit, and I hid across the street and watched. I saw her come out with this man, and I can identify him too."

Decker showed her Kolesky's mug shot and asked, "Him?"

"Yes," she said, "that's the man. He came outside with her, and then he hit her and she went limp, and he grabbed her head and twisted. It was awful. Then a cab pulled up and he put her in it and they drove off. Then Matson showed up in his convertible and followed them. I was scared speechless, and didn't know what to do. I had no money and I was afraid to go home, so I finally went to my husband and told him everything."

"That's right," Owens said. "We talked it all over. Beegee's learned her lesson and we're going to try to fix up our marriage, give it another chance. But first, I insisted she come here and tell you the whole story."

Which left everybody happy—except Mitch. Because this little chippy showed up at the wrong time

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and grabbed the spotlight, nobody was particularly interested in what Mitch had done and how smart he'd been getting hold of the dress. The way Beegee hung on to that dress gave him a swift pain. He kept thinking how nice it would look on Amy.

And just to make the cheese more binding, Mitch still hadn't been able to finagle it so he could get back Car Number Four. Brother, he told himself disgustedly on his way home that night, if I'd known what kind of day this was gonna be, I woulda stood in bed.

CONGRATULATIONS The story that you have just read—Lawrence Treat's *A As in Accident*—is the 9th story in Mr. Treat's new series of modern police procedurals. The second story of the series—*H As in Homicide,* in the March 1964 issue of EQMM—was rated by Mystery Writers of America as the best mystery-detective short story published in United States magazines during 1964, and was awarded the coveted "Edgar" for that year. Congratulations to Lawrence Treat, not only for the prize-winning story but for his entire series; and congratulations to Dorothy Salisbury Davis for her story, *The Purple Is Everything,* in the June 1964 issue of EQMM, which was one of the two runners-up for the 1964 short-story "Edgar."

More good news: Mr. Treat will continue his excellent series about Inspector Mitch Taylor, lab man Jub Freeman, Lieutenant Decker, and the others of the Homicide Squad. The next new story, *A As in Alibi,* will appear in EQMM soon. Don't miss it!

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JERICHO AND THE SILENT WITNESSES

by HUGH PENTECOST

(*continued from page 39*)

"I'm calling you, unofficially, from a phone booth," Welch went on, "I'm leaving the precinct house in about five minutes with a couple of men to pick you up. I have to act on the information."

"Why are you telling me?"

"Because I think it's a fake," Welch said. "But they can make it stick. There'll be more witnesses who'll come forward. They'll wrap you up for the D.A. like a Christmas package."

"I have a witness to what I was doing and where I was when the screaming began."

"The Laverne girl?"

"Yes."

"Not the best of character witnesses. But hang onto her in case I find you."

"In case?"

"You damned fool, I'm calling to tell you to take a powder!" Welch said, suddenly angry. "If you stay out of sight we may still latch onto the right guy. I pick you up and the case'll be closed faster than you can say Jack the Ripper. Get going—you have no more than a fifteen-minute headstart."

Jericho put down the phone and stood very still for a moment, staring down at the long line of mourners in the Mews. Then he turned quickly away and went to his closet. He changed back into his loose fitting corduroy jacket, checking on his pipe, pouch, and wallet. As he slipped on the jacket, he stared, frowning, at the stack of canvases against the wall. He seemed reluctant to leave them.

But his decision was made, and he turned abruptly, stalked out into the hall, and locked the door behind him. He moved quickly and silently down the stairs.

Mike Guffanti, ex-prizefighter turned handyman, was lounging by the front door. There was something different about him. He wasn't smiling. His face had a kind of ash-gray look to it.

"Goin' out, John?" he asked.

"The heat is suddenly on," Jericho said. "Is there a back way out of here, Mike?"

Mike Guffanti moistened his lips. "No."

"Where does that door at the back of the hall lead?"

"Basement."

"And no way out of the basement?"

"No."

"You're lying, Mike," Jericho said quietly.

Mike Guffanti moved, casually,

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so that he stood between Jericho and the back door. "Have it your way," he said. "But if you go out you got to go out the front."

"You've changed sides. Right, Mike?" Jericho asked.

Mike's hands opened and closed at his sides. "Maybe," he said.

"I'm leaving by the back way, Mike," Jericho said. "Let's not have any trouble about it."

The ex-prizefighter raised his hands awkwardly. "You'll have to go through me, John," he said.

Jericho's left shot out and caught Mike on the jaw. Mike led clumsily with his left and Jericho's right smashed against his mouth. Mike's knees turned to rubber and he sank down, a silly smile on his bruised lips. But he reached out and clung to Jericho. Jericho tried to wrench free.

"Make it look good, John," Mike whispered.

Jericho stared at him, his eyes wide. Mike was deliberately taking a beating. No former pro would have handled himself so badly.

"Hurry!" Mike whispered.

Jericho's right raked the grinning face, leaving a scarlet bruise across Mike's cheek. Mike went down and lay on his side, his eyes closed. Jericho stepped over him and opened the back door.

It led to an alley stacked with garbage cans. There was a high board fence opposite the door, obviously blocking off the gardens of houses in the next street. Jericho bounded toward it, jumped, grabbed the top of the fence, and pulled himself over. In a small ill-kept garden on the other side he hesitated, listening. There were no sounds from the Mews, no cries for help from Mike.

Jericho found an alley between buildings. He ran along it and out onto the street. By some miracle a taxi was just cruising by. Jericho flagged it and popped in.

"Times Square Subway Station," Jericho said, and slumped down in the back seat of the cab. After they had driven a few blocks he straightened up in the seat and looked out the rear window. Sunday traffic was moderate. There was no sign of anyone tailing them.

"Something wrong?" the driver asked.

Jericho glanced into the rear-view mirror. "Running out on my wife," he said.

The driver laughed. "She don't beat you, does she? You look pretty big for the average dame."

Jericho lowered his eyes to the man's license in its metal frame. "Sean Flannery. Well, Sean, I just don't want to be caught," Jericho said.

Shrewd Irish eyes glanced up at the mirror. "I'd say no one was tailing you, but you want me to give it the Houdini treatment?"

"Whatever that may be."

Brakes squealed and the cab shot east off Fifth Avenue and raced the crosstown block to Park Avenue

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South, swung downtown, cut east the next block, then raced back to Fifth.

"Breath easy, Mister," the driver said as he slowed his pace and started north on Fifth again. "No one following."

On Thirty-ninth Street they headed west and then up Sixth to Forty-second and west again to Times Square. Jericho climbed out and paid off.

"Thanks for the joy ride," he said.

"You could be Irish with that beard," Sean Flannery said. "Only an Irishman can run from a dame with honor."

Jericho grinned at him and walked quickly to the subway entrance. He would not be forgotten by Sean Flannery if there was a public alarm for a big man with a red beard. For that reason he had not taken the cab to his destination.

He took a Queens train and got out at its first stop on the East Side. From there he strode toward Lee Fanning's apartment on Beekman Place. In the lobby of the apartment house Jericho gave Lee's buzzer the special ring that would identify him.

There was no answer.

Frowning, he walked to the self-service elevator and rode up to the eleventh floor. No one answered his ring at the door of 11F. He hesitated for a moment, then took a keyring from his pocket, selected a key, and unlocked the door. He went in, calling out Lee's name.

Still no answer.

The two girls weren't in the apartment. Everything seemed to be in order. The breakfast dishes had been washed. The coffee percolator, half full, unplugged, stood on the kitchen table.

Jericho went back into the living room. On a small table near the front door he saw one of Lee's handbags—the one he had given her for her last birthday. He opened it. Her keys were in it; her change purse, a compact and lipstick; a handkerchief; a memo book with a grocery list scrawled on its front page. If Lee had gone out, taking another bag, wouldn't she have at least transferred the keys and change purse to the bag she took with her?

Jericho hurried to the bedroom. No disorder, and no sign whatever that Lucinda Laverne had ever been there.

Jericho returned to the living room and checked the front door. It hadn't been left on the latch. Without her keys there would have been no way for Lee to get back in without rousing the janitor for the use of his passkey.

Jericho stood in the center of the room, his thick red eyebrows drawn together in a deep scowl.

The phone rang.

Jericho moved quickly, but hesitated when his big hand closed on the instrument. Then he picked it up and spoke in a muffled voice.

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"J. J.'s Delicatessen," he said.

"*What?* What the hell's wrong there, John?" It was George Godfrey.

"No women," Jericho said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. No women. How did I get in? I don't like to jar your moral code, George, but I have a key."

"All hell's broken loose down here," George said. "They're looking for you. Cops, plus Zander's friendly little mob. They found the handyman you beat up. But where *are* the girls?"

"I had hoped you could tell me," Jericho said. "Lee left without her keys, her change purse, and other necessary female do-dads."

"Damn it, John, I never wanted Lee mixed up in this mess."

"You told me you were sure you weren't followed here when you brought Lucinda."

"I wasn't. You must have been followed this morning in that fire engine of yours."

"I wasn't," Jericho said.

"Maybe they just went out to a movie or something," George said, not hopefully. "I told them not to leave the apartment till we knew what the score was. But maybe they got restless."

"Without a key to get back in?" Jericho asked.

"You know women—they forget things."

"All right. Now we've played that game out, how do you really figure it?"

"We're both sure we weren't followed but one of us must be wrong," George said. "But where would they go? Or why would someone force them to go somewhere, John?"

"It's part of a frameup—of me," Jericho said. "The cops know it. I was warned by Welch, the precinct captain. The killer wants me off his back. I wish I knew what I had on him that makes me so dangerous."

"You'd better get out of there, John," George said. "Do I tell Welch what's happened—that the girls are gone?"

"You tell him," Jericho said. "But tell him you found it out on your own. Don't mention me. I don't want to burden him with facts he'll feel he has to act on."

"Will do."

"Did you get to talk to Harry Baker?"

"Haven't been able to locate him yet."

"Listen, George," Jericho said. "You haven't talked to me, you haven't heard from me, you don't know where I am. Clear?"

"I don't like it, John. I'm scared for the girls."

"Me too," Jericho said grimly. "I wasn't followed here, but there might have been someone stationed across the street, watching for me. Whatever we do we'll have to do it fast. Talk to Welch, then find Harry

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Baker. He's our one small lead."

Captain Welch's face was a rigid mask of fatigue. He'd been called out of bed shortly after two in the morning, after one hour's sleep, to deal with the murder of Mary Brady. It was now late in the afternoon. He needed a shave. His eyes were red and dry-looking, as if they burned. He listened to George Godfrey's story without comment.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "Jericho turned over the Laverne girl to you with instructions to deliver her to Miss Fanning for safekeeping. You took her there and you're sure you weren't followed."

"Right."

"Now they're gone, without word to you, and Miss Fanning left her bag, with keys and change purse, inside the locked flat?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because—because the keys and purse are there!"

"So how did you get into the apartment, Mr. Godfrey, to know that the keys and purse are still there?"

"Well, I—"

"Suppose you and I stop playing games with each other," Welch said wearily. "That's where Jericho went when he skipped out of his studio earlier this afternoon. You've been in touch with him there."

"No!"

"All right, Mr. Godfrey. This office isn't bugged. What you say here is to me. But if you don't want to say it, at least let's understand that I know what you're talking about. Now, you imply that somebody—probably the man who killed Mary Brady—had the girls taken away from that apartment against their will. Why?"

"Maybe he thinks they know something," George said.

"Kidnaping is a serious crime," Welch said, "We can throw the whole book at someone for that. As I said before, suppose we stop playing games. Just what does Jericho know?"

"Nothing. I mean, he doesn't know what it is he's supposed to know."

Welch's mouth twisted in an exasperated grimace.

"My guess is that Jericho thinks Zander was involved in Mary Brady's murder," George said. "But he has no evidence, no proof."

"Zander? But Mary Brady was Zander's girl!" Welch said sharply.

"I know. John knows."

"And he still thinks Zander's involved?"

"That's my guess, Captain."

"Okay." Welch lit a cigarette, puffed hard, then looked as if the cigarette had no flavor. "You want me to look for the girls. We have to walk softly, Mr. Godfrey. If it is a kidnaping. What next?"

"I'm trying to locate a man who plays the piano at Zander's club. Name of Harry Baker."

Welch's eyes narrowed. "I know

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him. Lives in the neighborhood. Why do you want him?"

"John thinks he knows something."

Welch took another deep drag on his cigarette. "This begins to get real sticky, Mr. Godfrey," he said. "Harry Baker used to be one of the top jazz piano players in the country. He still is—but he's not professionally reliable. He's an addict."

"Heroin?"

Welch nodded. "We know it. We could pick him up. We have picked him up a couple of times. Two trips to Kentucky. As soon as he gets back the boys find him and start him off again. Behaves himself. No point in whipping him, and we know he won't reveal his source. None of them will. Mary Brady got him his job at Zander's club. He'd been working in some dive with her when Zander discovered her."

Welch nodded slowly. "Baker owed Mary. He liked her. He might want to help, but he won't, Mr. Godfrey. They'd cut off his supply. He couldn't stand that."

"I could try if I knew where to find him," George said.

"I'll get you his address," Welch said, picking up the phone on his desk. "We know where all the addicts in our precinct live."

He asked the desk sergeant for the address and wrote it down on a piece of paper. "Your friend Jericho's a romantic type guy, wouldn't you say? Damsels in distress appeal to him. Well, he's got a hatful of them right now."

"He's a lone wolf," George said. "Kind of crusader. He runs cockeyed risks himself, and he expects other people to run cockeyed risks. I asked him to keep Lee Fanning out of this."

"She goes for crusades?"

George's mouth tightened. "She's in love with him," he said.

"You with her?"

"Yes, God help me," George said.

Welch pushed back his chair. "I'll put a flea in your ear, Mr. Godfrey," he said. "I told Jericho we've been trying to get the goods on Zander for a long time. We have a dossier on Zander as long as your arm—suspected activities, lists of friends and associates. My flea is this: on that list of friends and associates is the name of Mabel Chernovsky—Lucinda Laverne to you."

"But according to John, Zander blew his top at the sight of her—flew at her here in your office, flew at her later at the wake."

Welch shrugged. "All the same, she is or was connected with Zander."

"What are you trying to tell me?" George asked.

"Just that she may not be in as much trouble as your friend Miss Fanning," Welch said.

George Godfrey paused on the third-floor landing of a small apartment house on Jane Street. From up

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above came the sound of a piano, crisply played in jazz rhythm, with a solid left hand and a virtuoso right. *As The Saints Go Marching By,* with brilliant variations.

Harry Baker was at home, and evidently feeling no pain.

George climbed the top flight of stairs and knocked on the door of the apartment from which the music came. Nothing happened until he repeated the knock several times. The music ended in an impatient discord, then the door was yanked open and the Negro piano player looked out, bright-eyed and hostile.

One look was enough for George. Harry Baker had had a recent fix and was flying high.

"I'd like to talk to you, Harry," George said.

"Some other time, man."

"Now," George said. "It's important. About Mary Brady."

A spasmodic twitch lifted the corner of Harry Baker's mouth. "You hear me playing in there, man? That was Mary's favorite beat tune. I was hoping she could hear it somewhere." His eyes narrowed. "You a cop? I don't recognize you from these parts."

George hesitated. "I'm George Godfrey, a friend of John Jericho's," he said.

"He needs friends," Harry said. "I can't help you."

"Let me be the judge of that?"

"I saw him at the wake," Harry said. "He don't make sense, man. You don't mess around with Zander unless you hold all the cards, and then some."

"May I come in and talk to you a minute?"

A little shudder seemed to move inside Harry Baker's clothes. "I don't want any part of what's going on, man. Like I said, I can't help you."

"Maybe if you won't answer questions I'll know which are the important ones," George said.

"Sorry."

"I don't want to get rough with you, Harry, but I'll tell you how it is. The whole city is looking for John on a bum murder rap. He didn't kill Mary Brady, and you know it. While he's trying to save his own skin, his girl and that Laverne woman have been kidnaped. That's supposed to tell Jericho to lay off—or else. I'll tell you this, Harry: if anything happens to that girl—Jericho's girl—neither he nor I will let up as long as we live. The first thing I'd arrange would be to have your supply cut off—forever, man. Because, in spite of what you say, I think you *can* help."

"Supply?" Harry's voice was hollow.

"Let's stop talking in circles, Harry. You know exactly what I mean."

Harry stepped back from the door. "Come in," he said. "You play kind of rough yourself, man."

It was darkish in the apartment. The only windows in the place opened on a court which the sunshine of late afternoon had passed

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by. Music in manuscript was scattered on the upright piano and on the floor around it. The furniture belonged with a cheap rented room. Ashtrays were piled high with old butts. There was a glossy photograph of Louis Armstrong thumbtacked to the wall, with an inscription to Harry Baker written across the bottom of it.

"You want a drink or a cup of coffee?" Harry asked.

"I want to talk," George said. Little beads of perspiration stood out on his high forehead. It was suffocatingly hot in the small room. Stale cigarette smoke almost choked him. "Could we get a little air in here?"

"Sure," Harry said. He opened a window onto a fire escape. "I don't know what you think I can tell you, man. I don't know nothing about your missing girls. I don't know nothing about who killed Mary. I was playing piano at the club when she died."

"But you saw her leave the club and you thought she went to meet someone."

"Jericho told you that?"

"Yes."

Harry sprawled himself out on a couch with broken springs, which creaked. He closed his eyes. "You never got on the stuff, did you, Mr. Godfrey?"

"No."

"If you were told, or you read about it or heard about it, you still couldn't know what it's like," he said. "They had me in Lexington, Kentucky, twice. And twice I kicked it because I had no choice. And twice I came back and couldn't wait until I made my contact again. I couldn't live a week without it, Mr. Godfrey. It could get so bad that I might kill a man to get it. It's got nothing to do with who I like, or what I believe in. *I just got to have it,* and I won't do anything at all that might make it tough for me to get. I'm sorry about Jericho. He tried to help Mary. I'm sorry about your girls. *But I can't help you!*"

The expression on George's tired face was peculiarly hard and unyielding. "I guess, Harry, when you find yourself in a squeeze you have to choose. You think helping me might result in a cutoff of your supply. Which means Zander has something to do with that supply. So, much as you'd like to help, you can't."

"That's it, man."

"Well, let me show you the other side of the squeeze, Harry. I'm a newspaperman. I can bring all kinds of pressures to bear. Captain Welch lets you alone because you're a small-time, hopeless user. But if he wanted to take you in, all he has to do is catch you with the stuff. He'll catch you, Harry, because if I have to have an army watching you I'll do it."

"Oh, man!" Harry moaned.

"If we fight this thing through to a win, Harry, then Zander will be out of business—with or without

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help from you. But if you don't help now I won't forget you, even if we win. So figure the odds. I think your best chance would be to play our side of the street, Harry."

"Oh, man!"

"There isn't much time to think about it, Harry. If anything happens to those girls we'll go through everybody even remotely connected with it like a dose of salts."

Harry opened frightened eyes. "You don't look like a man without a heart," he said.

"I've got a heart, but right now it isn't working for anyone who won't help take the heat off those girls."

The black eyelids closed again. "Tell me how it was," he said. "Tell me how they were taken."

"We don't know," George said. Briefly he outlined what he had done. He'd taken Lucinda to Lee's apartment. He was certain they hadn't been followed. He'd left Lucinda with Lee Fanning, with instructions that neither girl leave the apartment until they had word from him or Jericho that it was safe. No one had told them it was safe, and now they were gone, with Lee's handbag, containing her keys, still inside the apartment.

Harry Baker lay stretched out on the couch, his eyes closed. His lips quivered as he listened.

"Surely, if you weren't followed," he said, "you must see how the girls were found by whoever took them."

"I don't see," George said.

"Who knew where they were besides you, man?"

"Jericho."

"Then there's only one answer, man. Just one answer."

"What is it?"

"For God's sake, George, don't make me tell you. *Think!*"

George lit a cigarette, staring with narrowed eyes at the miserable man on the couch. He was about to speak when some movement at the window caught his attention. It took an effort for him not to speak. Crouched on the fire escape was the huge bearded figure of Jericho. A silencing finger was raised to his lips.

"If no one but you and Jericho knew where the girls were then there's only one answer, man," Harry said.

"I still don't get it," George said.

Harry's body writhed. "I can tell you some places you won't find them," he said. "You know they're not at the Fanning girl's apartment. You won't find them where Lucinda lives. You won't find them in Zander's apartment over the Twelfth Street Club. They're not here—you can see that for yourself. You might look where they're still holding the wake, but I doubt they're there. Isn't that enough, man? Won't that save you time looking?"

"How did Zander locate them? I want the answer, Harry."

Harry's breath came out of him in a long sigh. "You know why it's

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so tough to stop the flow of heroin into this country?" Harry asked.

"How did Zander locate the girls?" George demanded, pounding his fist on the arm of his chair.

Harry spoke in a dreamy voice, as if he hadn't heard George. "Most of it comes from Italy," he said. "Grown in the Middle East, processed in laboratories in Marseilles and other places, shipped to Italy where the big shots get rich smuggling it into this country. It's hard to stop 'em because you can bring in a million dollars worth stuffed in your ear! It gets here by ship. Maybe dropped overboard in a floating package, maybe carried onto the pier by a sailor or a steward, then passed to someone working on the dock and carried off in a lunch pail. Thousands and thousands of bucks' worth, man. It's split a lot of ways. To the grower, the laboratory technician, the shipper, the carrier, the receiver on the dock."

"Zander?"

"Someone with contacts on the docks," Harry said, shaking his head as though he were in pain. "The man on the dock passes it to the pusher who gets it to me—diluted, costly. So damned costly, man."

"I'll be interested in this lecture—with colored slides—some other time," George said, angry. "Time's running out, Harry. How did Zander locate the girls?"

"Listen to me, man, will you? *Listen!* The pusher's got it on me because I *need* it. The dock man has it on the pusher, and vice versa. The man on the ship has it on the dock man, and vice versa. The shipper has it on the ship man, and vice versa. And so on and so on, back to the Turkish farmer who grows the poppies. If any one of them gets in trouble and needs help from the others, he gets help. He's got to get help or the whole chain of operation is in danger. So—"

"So *what?*"

"A boat came in from Italy yesterday. It sails back tomorrow," Harry said.

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Man, I'm trying to help you!" Harry cried out. "I am helping—but I can't name names."

George lifted his eyes to glance at the window.

Jericho was gone.

It was dark. The night watchman on Pier X was sitting in a little cubicle reading a paperback detective story. The dark tunnel of the pier, spotted along its length by a few raw electric light bulbs, was as still as a tomb. The dark sides of a passenger liner, the Contessa Dimareo, loomed up beyond the ceiling of the pier. Lights twinkled in a dozen or more portholes, but there was no sign of life on the ship's decks.

Outside the mouth of the pier a dark shadow crept closer and closer to the watchman's booth. A few trucks clattered along the avenue

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underneath the West Side highway.

The shadow reached the rear of the booth. The watchman put down his paperback and began to fill a pipe from a can of tobacco. The shadow was motionless. Then, his pipe going, the watchman went back to his reading.

Instantly the shadow, crouching low, moved directly in front of the booth and onto the pier, jumping noiselessly over the protecting chain, quick and graceful as a stalking jungle tiger.

The shadow moved in the darkness of the far side of the pier from the Contessa Dimarco. It paused by a stack of crates, obviously there to be loaded on the boat the next morning. Stuck in the side of one of the crates was a cargo hook.

The shadow raised a hand and twisted the hook loose. The shadow's other hand tested the murderously sharp point on the hook's curved end. Then it moved again until it was directly opposite the gangway leading up to the Contessa Dimarco's Deck A.

Here the pier was lighter. Anyone on deck could clearly see a person approaching the gangway. The shadow crouched in the darkness, watching. A ship's officer moved casually along the deck, past the gangway, then out of sight.

The shadow came out into the open—a red-bearded man, the cargo hook grasped in his left hand. He raced across the lighted open space and up the gangway. Just as he approached the top he was hailed by the ship's officer.

"What you want? You no can come on ship!"

They met at the top of the gangway. Jericho's right hand hit like a pile driver on the man's jaw. Down went the third officer of the Contessa Dimarco with Jericho on top of him. Seconds later the man was trussed up, his own handkerchief stuffed in his slack mouth. Jericho then dragged the unconscious body into the shadows and left it there.

In a cabin on Deck A a man and a woman sat at a table drinking champagne and eating tiny caviar sandwiches. The man was clearly one of the ship's stewards, out of uniform. The woman was Lucinda Laverne. A second bottle of champagne rested in an ice bucket on another table nearby.

The door of the cabin opened—and closed sharply. Lucinda and the steward turned to see Jericho leaning against the door, the cargo hook gripped in his right hand. He was smiling, but it wasn't a pleasant sight.

"Hello, Lucinda," he said.

She slumped down in her chair, terror in her eyes. The steward rose, belligerent.

"Whoever the hell you are, get out of here!" he said.

"You have thirty seconds in which to make up your mind to do exactly as I tell you," Jericho said to the steward. "Then a rip with this—" he made an uppercutting

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gesture with the hook—"and a tear —" the hook glittered in the cabin's light as he slashed down with it—"and after that I'll strangle every last breath out of your body and float you away in the river's garbage."

Lucinda moved—out of her chair and toward Jericho. "Oh, John, thank God you've come. I—"

He struck her, flat-handed, across the cheek; she spun around and went crashing against the table.

"I want you to take me to Miss Fanning," Jericho said.

The steward measured his chances and decided they were nil.

"Help her up," Jericho said, gesturing toward Lucinda.

The steward helped the girl to her feet.

"John, what's the matter with you? Why—"

"Fun's over," Jericho said. "I want Lee and I want her quick."

"They brought us here," Lucinda said, "God knows why. This man —this beast—was making a pass at me. I was playing for time. I—"

"Cut it out, Lucinda," Jericho said. "There's no way they could have found you—*unless you told them yourself*. What happened? Did you phone them while Lee was in the bathroom? Never mind. I'll get it out of you later, quietly and thoroughly. Now I want Lee."

The steward shrugged and led the way into the passage and to a cabin three doors away. He used a key to unlock the door. He went in, followed by Lucinda, with Jericho and his cargo hook right behind them.

Lee sat in an armchair in the middle of the cabin, her hands and feet tied, a piece of adhesive tape plastered over her mouth.

"Untie her," Jericho said.

The steward knelt to undo the ropes. Lee, her eyes wide, stared at Jericho. The steward rose and reached for the adhesive tape.

"I'll do that," Jericho said.

His hand touched Lee's cheek.

"It's going to hurt," he said.

He loosened an edge of the tape and then gave it a quick jerk. Instantly he bent down and kissed her very gently. "When I was a kid it was always 'kiss it and make it well'," he said.

Her hands were cold as she reached up and touched his face.

The steward made a sudden dash for the cabin door. Jericho spun around and reached out with the cargo hook. The sharp point tore into the man's shoulder. He screamed and went down on his knees.

"You two girls—into the passage," Jericho said.

The girls went out. Jericho eased the hook out of the moaning steward's shoulder. "March," he said. "After them."

In the passageway Lee Fanning closed her fingers on Jericho's wrist. "The girl's one of them, John."

"I know, darling," Jericho said, his eyes very bright. "It was when

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I figured that—and a couple of other things—that I knew where to look for you. But there's no time to talk. We've got to get out of here, and fast."

He tapped the moaning steward on his uninjured shoulder with the cargo hook. "You keep your trap shut or I'll really use this on you."

They made their way along the passage to the deck. Out in the night air Jericho moved quickly to the place where he'd left the deck officer tied up. The man was gone.

Far away, down the pier, they heard a shrill whistle, echoed by an answering whistle much closer. Jericho stood very still, muscles rippling along the line of his bearded jaw. Then he walked over and faced the steward.

"I'm sorry about this," he said, and knocked the man cold with one sledge-hammer punch to the jaw.

Then he reached out and closed his hand over Lucinda Laverne's wrist. "We may or may not get out of this alive," he said in a conversational tone. "I did a bum job tying up the deck officer and he's spread the alarm. But you, baby—" his bright eyes were fixed on Lucinda "—you and I are going to stick together like ham and eggs, because if anything happens to us it's going to happen to you first. From me—without love! Now, down the gangway, fast."

"No!" Lucinda said.

"Don't make me twist it off, baby."

"They won't let me off the pier," Lucinda said, her voice shaking. "I'll be the first one they'll go for, John—because I know too much. They'll never let me get away."

"After all the help you've given them, baby?"

"Because I know too much, I tell you!"

The whistle and its echo sounded again on the pier, closer this time. Jericho felt Lee's fingers grip his left arm. She was frightened.

"Back inside," Jericho said. "There has to be a way through to the deck on the other side."

They went back into the main saloon. There were still no signs of life on the ship itself, except the sudden sound of the ship's bells. From a wall rack Jericho took two life preservers. "Run!" he said.

They made for the other side of the ship and came out onto the deck. Jericho heard his breath come out in a long sigh of relief. The berth next to the Contessa Dimarco was empty. Silently he got the two girls into the life preservers. He stared down into the rippling black water.

"I can't see in the dark," he said, "but there are probably ladders down the pilings of the next pier to the water. You climb up on the rail, Lee, and I'm going to give you a push—well out from the ship. Make for the pilings. If we don't catch up with you, climb out and

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get away from here as fast as you can. But no noise. We want them searching the ship for a bit. Grab a taxi and get to Captain Welch at his precinct station, or turn yourself over to a cop, if you see one."

Lee nodded, her lips compressed. She climbed up onto the rail, clinging to one of the stanchions.

"No worse than a Coney Island roller coaster, darling," Jericho said. And he pushed her, hard.

The splash sounded small and far away.

"Now, baby, your turn," Jericho said to Lucinda.

"I can't swim!" she cried out.

"I go with you, baby," Jericho said. "You're my prize, my brass ring. I don't want anything to happen to you, you little double-crosser, until much later." He hoisted her onto the rail and climbed up beside her, still hanging on to her left wrist. "Now!" he said.

He projected them both out into the darkness and toward the water.

Lee Fanning, swimming strongly toward the adjoining pier, was almost certain she'd heard the impact of Jericho and Lucinda hitting the water behind her, but she didn't turn to look back. She reached the pilings of the pier and, in complete darkness, felt around until she found the ladder Jericho had said would be there. Clinging to it, she looked back for Jericho, just as a searchlight from the wheelhouse of the Contessa Dimarco swept the water.

Lee clung to the ladder, praying. She saw no sign of Jericho or Lucinda in the beam of light. The light swung Lee's way. She drew a deep breath and lowered herself below the surface of the water, holding her breath until she thought her lungs would burst, until she had to surface. The light had passed.

On the deck of the liner she heard excited voices. The light was suddenly extinguished. Either the men on the ship had decided they'd gone a different way, or they were already making for the next pier to greet them.

Still clinging to the ladder, Lee managed to unfasten the cumbersome life preserver. Then she climbed up toward the dark outlines of the pier. She reached the top level and quickly ran through the opening into the sanctuary of the pier itself. It was a great black tunnel. There were no lights here. Apparently no ship was docked on either side of this pier.

Dripping wet, her golden hair matted around her face, Lee raced for the street. There was confusion out there. She heard many voices raised in what sounded like commands. Then she heard shots.

At the mouth of the pier she hesitated. The watchman of this pier had left his booth and run out to the street. He stood with his back to Lee, watching what was going on.

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Lee heard a little sob of relief come up out of her throat. Outside, the street was jammed with police cars. Ignoring the watchman, she ran straight out into the clear, her wet clothes clinging to her legs, as if they meant to hold her back. She shouted as she ran, and then two policemen, climbing out of a patrol car, their guns drawn, saw her.

"There are two others—back in the water," Lee cried, as she stumbled toward one of the cops.

And then, unbelievably, she heard a familiar voice calling her name. A moment later she was in the reassuring arms of George Godfrey, who kept saying her name over and over in a broken voice.

Captain Welch came into his office from the main section of the precinct station. Lee was there, wrapped in a warm coat, holding a towel with which she dried and fluffed out her blonde hair. George stood by her, protective, anxious. Someone had produced a pint of whiskey from which Lee had evidently had a stiff drink.

"Nothing," Welch said, his face grim. "They didn't come up onto either pier. We've got a police launch searching the river."

"Oh, my God," Lee whispered.

"You didn't hear any shots, Miss Fanning?"

Lee shook her head. "Not till I'd gotten onto the next pier and headed for the street. But the shots I heard came from the street."

"There were shots on the street," Welch said.

"John is a powerful swimmer," Lee said.

"But he had the girl to deal with," Welch said.

"Where do we stand?" George asked.

"In the middle of nowhere," Welch said. He sounded angry. "Let's go over it once more, Miss Fanning. You and the Laverne girl were in your apartment. Take it from there."

"Naturally I trusted her," Lee said. "John wanted her protected. She seemed exhausted. She hadn't had any sleep, she told me. I knew she'd been with John when the Brady girl was killed, and had been up all night until he brought her to my place for breakfast. I suggested she try to get some sleep, and I bedded her down in my room and left her there with the door shut.

"I puttered around the apartment. I had my hifi set playing some records. There was a knock at the door and I went to it." She shrugged. "I should have played it cautiously, but the whole thing hadn't really added up for me then. I just opened the door the way I would normally. I suppose it was about an hour after Lucinda had gone in to lie down."

"There were two men there?" Welch asked.

Lee nodded. "They barged into the place and one of them grabbed me. At that moment Lucinda came

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out of the bedroom. Then I knew. She'd phoned from the extension in the bedroom. She knew the men. One of them said 'Nice going,' or something like that. I was hustled out into the hall and to the elevator. A third man was waiting in the elevator. He'd turned off the juice so that no one else could use it. We went down. There was a car at the curb."

"You didn't get the license number?"

"I never got a chance to see it. We were driven straight to the pier—onto the pier itself. I didn't see any watchman."

"Conveniently having a quick beer across the street," Welch said. "We've talked to him. He admits he left his post, but he doesn't know anything." Welch made an angry growling sound. "Never any witnesses on the waterfront."

"The only person we saw on the boat was the steward. You'd have no difficulty identifying him. John wounded him in the shoulder with a cargo hook."

"But he hasn't been found," Welch said. "You could, obviously, identify the three men who took you to the pier. But it's a hundred to one you'll never lay eyes on them."

"Zander?" George asked.

"At his Twelfth Street Club all evening," Welch said, "in plain view of a hundred and fifty customers. The Zanders of this world are always thoroughly alibied when there's trouble. Indirectly, Harry Baker tipped you off to the ship and you tipped us, too late. But that's all you'll ever get out of Baker. He'd rather cut out his tongue than talk directly. His 'supply' depends on his silence."

"But Lucinda knows everything!" Lee said.

"She isn't going to do us much good if we find her and Jericho floating around in the North River, drowned corpses."

Lee raised a hand to her mouth. "I don't say that's it. But that's the pattern. If they didn't get away that's how we'll find them." Welch paused to light a cigarette. "I'm going to give you a lot of pictures to look at, Miss Fanning. Mug shots. There's a chance you may recognize one or more of the three men who took you to the pier, or the steward. I'm not hopeful, but it's a routine we have to go through."

"And what do we do about John?" Lee asked.

"We wait and hope," Welch said.

"If he hadn't tried to handle it himself, if he'd only called you instead of trying to be a big shot," George said.

A thin smile flickered on Welch's lips. "I think I understand your resentment, Mr. Godfrey." He glanced at Lee. "But let me tell you something that as a policeman I shouldn't say. If he'd come to us the chances are pretty good they'd have been warned. When we arrived at the pier in force they had definitely been warned. The only

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safe witness is a dead witness. As a cop I shouldn't say it, but I don't think Miss Fanning would be here now if Jericho hadn't acted on his own. The minute we began to board that ship she'd have been sileneed for keeps."

The evening at Pat Zander's Twelfeth Street Club had been a strange one. It was, in effect, a continuation of the wake for Mary Brady. Early in the evening Zander had made an announcement from the little platform where Harry Baker's piano stood.

"All of you know," he said to the assembled customers, "what a sad day this is for us. A great talent has been snatched away from us, brutally and without mercy. It had been my intention to close the club out of respect to Mary. But then it occurred to me there was one thing Mary would have liked. Not grief, not sorrow, not mourning. If she'd known it was coming she'd have liked to give a party for her friends. And so tonight is on Mary. No checks. Harry here will play some of the ballads and songs she loved so much and that you loved to hear her sing. She'd like you to have fun, I think, so don't be sad. It would please her to know that she could say 'thank you' to all of you in this way."

And so Harry, looking unnaturally bright and tense, played the piano, and eventually people began to sing. It never got raucous. Somehow the free drinks didn't lead to any excesses.

There was another odd thing about the evening. Zander never left the main room of the club. Ordinarily he spent the better part of the evening in his office, appearing only when he was needed. On this occasion he sat at a corner table alone, listening to the music, waiting —waiting for something.

Three times during the evening he received phone calls. He took the calls on the bar telephone in plain sight of the customers. He looked grim and taut as he listened, but he only spoke in monosyllables. Shortly before midnight he received a fourth and final call. It was lengthy, and as he listened, a knot of muscles moved along his jaw.

Shortly after that final call he signaled to Harry and mounted the music stand again.

"I hope you've all enjoyed yourself," he said to the crowd.

There was a ripple of applause.

"I'm going to close early now," he said. "As most of you know, the funeral will be tomorrow morning at ten." His voice broke. It would have been difficult to tell whether it was real or faked. "I want to spend the remaining time with—with Mary."

There was a moment of silence, and as Zander stepped down from the stand, Harry Baker began to play *As The Saints Go Marching*

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By. Ten minutes later the Twelfth Street Club was empty.

Zander left the club and walked the few blocks toward Jefferson Mews. Certainly he knew everything that had happened during the evening. Certainly he must have assumed that he was being watched. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. Far from being a time of mourning, the evening had been a solid alibi. Let them watch. He was clean.

The Mews was unnaturally quiet. The inevitable record players, radios, and TV sets were still. Ordinarily at midnight there were many lights in many windows. Tonight the residents of the Mews seemed to have retired early. Perhaps Zander was too preoccupied to notice this as he walked toward the house where Mary Brady lay in her coffin.

Zander was just a few yards from the door when a bulky figure moved out of the shadows.

"Hello, Zander," Jericho said in a sold, angry voice.

Zander stopped in his tracks. "So you got away." It was almost a whisper.

"Yes, friend, I got away," Jericho said.

"I ought to take care of you here and now," Zander said. "But it's out of my hands. The police are looking for you." His voice was suddenly loud. "You damn murderer!"

"That's right, Zander," Jericho said. "Turn up the volume. Because people are listening. Look around you, friend. Look up at the windows."

Zander's head jerked up. In the darkened windows of the Mews he saw faces—dozens of them.

"Don't worry," Jericho said. "No one will call the cops or give the alarm. You trained them, friend. You filled them with a nameless terror over the years, and they won't interfere. Just as they didn't interfere when you knifed Mary Brady to death."

"You're off your rocker!" Zander said, loud, with a kind of hollow defiance. He looked around at the windows. "Someone—call the cops!" he ordered.

The shadows in the windows remained motionless.

"You missed your calling, Zander," Jericho said. "You should have been an actor. My God, those cries of rage when a little streetwalker entered on stage. A wonderful act, Zander, designed to let the world think you had no connection with Lucinda at all."

"Cheap, two-bit—"

"Hold it," Jericho said grimly. "I'm telling the story to your next-to-last audience, Zander. Your final audience may be a judge and a jury. I say 'may be' because it's just possible you won't live to face them."

"You crazy son of a —" Zander yelled. "Somebody call the cops!"

The shadows remained frozen in place.

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"Mary Brady has been mourned today, and rightly," Jericho said. "She submitted to you, she was grateful to you, but when she found out the real truth about you she wouldn't let you go on. She came here last night to stop you—you and your go-between.

"Oh, Lucinda walked the streets all right. But not for the purpose most people thought. She was your delivery girl. She delivered the drugs you brought in off the docks. Mary Brady came here last night to watch the transaction, to get the final proof she needed. And you came after her and stopped her. Not quick and easy, because no one crosses you, Zander, and gets away with it quick and easy.

"And all these people watched, and all those people did nothing because they knew they would be next if they tried to involve you. Apathy, the papers called it. Not apathy, friend. It was cold, stark, gut-grinding terror. Well, ducky, now they're going to have a chance to watch again, and unless I'm wrong, they'll watch in silence. And even if they don't you've got no place to go. It's me or the cops, and either way you're finished."

"Where is Lucinda?" Zander asked, his voice hard.

"Where you won't find her," Jericho said. "All wrapped up and ready to deliver to the District Attorney. Ready to name names, dates, places. Right now it's between you and me, Zander. You had hands laid on my girl—filthy hands that worked for you. I'm afraid you may be able to talk your way out of that one in court. I don't suppose we'll find the men who did the job. You'd make sure of the safety of your own mob.

"But you've been careless about your own safety, Zander. You've been so careful about alibis. That figured. It also figured you wouldn't draw a gun and shoot me dead when I faced you here. You wouldn't be carrying a gun tonight, would you, ducky? There was just a chance Welch might pick you up. That was the first gamble I took in waiting for you here. If I'm wrong you'd better pull it now, because this is the moment of truth, ducky!"

For a moment the two men faced each other, motionless. Then Zander moved, quickly. He ripped off his coat, there was a clicking noise, and a beam of light reflected on a knife blade.

Jericho laughed. "Toys, yet," he said, and rushed in.

They said afterward that you could hear a shuddering breath of fear from those windows float over the Mews like a cold winter wind. They said there was no question in their minds what the outcome would be. Zander was invincible, Zander played by no rules; the red-bearded giant, showing a courage they all lacked, would be hacked to pieces by Zander's knife. Was foolhardy courage worthy of applause?

They said afterward that they

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looked around for Zander's friends. They were sure those friends would appear. Some watchers turned away from the windows—they couldn't bear their own cowardice. But then, when they heard the agonizing scream, they were forced back to see the end—the end of heroism, the end of decency.

What they saw was Zander down on his knees. They saw the knife lying on the ground a few feet away. They saw Zander's right arm hanging, obscenely crooked, helpless, at his side.

Those who had watched said that Jericho had moved like a ballet dancer inside the first slash of the knife, had caught the knife hand at the wrist, twisted it, and then broken it over his knee—like a man breaking a piece of kindling wood. They heard, they said, the splintering of bone. And then they all saw the red-bearded giant grab Zander by his shirt, pull him halfway to his feet, and smash a shattering blow to Zander's jaw that sent him sprawling and broken to the cobblestones.

No one timed it. It may have taken thirty seconds.

"The water was damned cold," Jericho said. He held a highball glass in his hand and the Irish whiskey in it was dark. He was scowling at the blank canvas on the easel in his studio in the Mews. Lee Fanning was pouring coffee for George Godfrey and Mike Guffanti, the janitor. Captain Welch had joined Jericho in a drink. "I'll have to get a new idea for this," Jericho said, turning away from the canvas. "That girl!"

"I've never cared for your taste in women—except me," Lee said.

Jericho seemed to wrench himself away from the blank canvas.

"When that searchlight came on I knew we weren't going to make the next pier," he said. "We had to submerge till the light passed, then we floated down the river and paddled our way to a pier about five or six blocks farther downtown. By the time we crawled up on a deserted pier we were damn near pooped out. But the lady was ready to talk. Oh, boy, was she ready!

"She'll make a statement, Welch. Last night she was standing on a street corner, waiting to deliver heroin, when she got word of trouble. Zander, on his way to the Mews, told her Mary Brady was about to spill the beans. Lucinda was about to take off when I came along—the big-hearted artist, seeing courage in her white face. Ha! What I took for courage was plain, white terror! So much for my remarkable gift for reading character in a face. She came with me because she knew that from my studio she'd probably see or hear what happened between Zander and Mary Brady."

Jericho took a deep swig of his drink. "Lucinda had to play along with me so she could warn Zander if we were getting close. In the end

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she knew we were, so she phoned from Lee's and the kidnaping followed.

"Well, to get back to that pier. The little lady spilled all. But she wasn't any good to you as a witness to the murder, Welch—she hadn't actually seen it. You needed a witness, so I decided to give you dozens of them—all those people in the Mews. If they could see Zander faced down and beaten, their fear of him would evaporate.

"I thought I had a friend here—Mike Guffanti." Jericho grinned at Mike, who winced as his battered face tried to smile back. "He was afraid too, but he had helped me get away from here . . . Well the girl and I dried out as best we could, and a soggy ten dollar bill got us here in a taxi without any questions. Mike and his wife agreed to stand guard over the girl while I waited for a rendezvous with Zander. That's about it."

"You're right about the witnesses," Welch said. "About twenty of them have come forward naming Zander as the killer of Mary Brady." He looked at Jericho with a kind of wry admiration. "I'm glad I'm not your insurance agent, Jericho."

"One favor," Jericho said.

"I owe you more than one," Welch said.

"Go easy on Harry Baker. Poor devil, he's a lost soul. But without him we might never have found Lee—at least, not in time. I'd like to help him—money, doctors, whatever. And I'd like you to let him alone if you can."

"I can," Welch said.

Jericho nodded abstractedly. He turned back to the blank canvas. "I've got to have a new idea for this," he said. "Any of you got any ideas?"

Lee Fanning sighed.

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